# The technologies of relationship and a new sense of interior life: Making teenagers aware of their creatureliness

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# The Technologies of Relationship and a New Sense of Interior Life

## Making Teenagers Aware of Their Creatureliness

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment Of the Requirements for the Sacred Theology Licentiate Degree (S.T.L.) From the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry

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## Introduction

Technology is changing us. It has been doing so right from the beginning of humanity. Currently, several concerns arise from the way teenagers are using the technologies of relationship (e.g. social networks; cell phones; blogs). Despite the more or less wise use of such technology, all of us are affected by the technological changes and that influences our approach to an understanding of reality. We can never appreciate the meaning and the consequences of such changes for Christian life, unless we take a look into human consciousness and into culture.

In this work I argue that Walter Ong's concept of "interiorization of technology" is suitable to be used to explain the transformation of consciousness produced among teenagers by the use of the technologies of relationship. I will explain how teenagers' identity is being shaped by such experience. I will narrow my attention to teenagers' interior life.

While being a way of carrying our contingency, technology can, paradoxically, remind us of our limits or hide them from us. From a Christian perspective such concealment would be tragic. Thus, accepting contingency as the place where the question of the origin of the world and the human being rises is important to deepen our experience of creatureliness and to preserve it from being diluted.

The main goal of this thesis is to ascertain if teenagers' inner life (and, consequently, their experience of creatureliness) is being challenged by the way they are interiorizing the technologies through which they are communicating. For this to be possible we need to verify how they are apprehending the reality of the world and themselves and to establish how their interior life is being shaped. Only by doing this can we achieve a relevant theological and pastoral proposal able to address teenagers' present situation, as I intend to propose as the conclusion of this thesis. To make this possible some steps are needed.

In the first chapter I introduce one of the key concepts of this thesis: the "interiorization of technology." This concept was coined by Walter Ong and allows us to understand how technologies shape human consciousness and how such changes need to be linked with the culture. I will follow Ong's steps that explain the move from orality to literacy. Such a move assumes writing as a technology and allows us to understand how a specific technology is able to transform human consciousness and transform our inner life, the balance between insideness and outsideness. All this transforms the way human beings perceive themselves in the cosmos.

As a way of reading the signs of the times, in the second chapter I point out how the interiorization of the technologies of relationship affect teenagers' interior lives and their relationships. I will use Ong's concepts exposed in the first chapter, applying them to what I describe as the *culture of disclosure.* By doing so I hope to start showing how their perception as creatures of God is being challenged.

In order to prepare the theological and pastoral answer to the described situation, the third chapter points out some of the most significant features of the human being as a creature. This chapter gives special attention to the concept of the human being as intrinsically related to God. By doing so it underlines the human's dependence on God, his or her interdependence with other humans and human's irreducibility to his/her nature.

By the end of this thesis I hope to have shown what the new sense of the interior life among teenager looks like and how we might be able to address it in a theological and pastoral way coherent with our Christian tradition.

# 1. Word, Technology and Human Consciousness

*"Consciousness is part of the culture."* (Romano Guardini)

## 1.1 Walter Ong's Thought

Walter Ong was an American linguist, a Jesuit and an important scholar who devoted his attention to the impact of the changes in the use of the word and its technologies in human consciousness and in the culture. According to his thought the word is the "basic agent holding society together."[1] Consequently, "most major developments in culture and consciousness are related to the evolution of the word from primary orality through chirography and typography to the electronic transformation of the word today."[2] The changes concerning the word cannot be separated from the technologies which support such change, namely writing. Thus, if technologies are deeply connected with the changes occurring in the word and with their subsequent impact on culture and on human consciousness, it is easy to understand why, according to Ong, "technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness and never more than when they affect the word."[3]

Given the subject of this thesis it is important to do a first and brief reference to the anthropology which is implicit underneath Ong's work. It is an anthropology committed to guarantee the integrity of human dignity. He does so by considering consciousness as the core of the human being, as the element which guarantees its integrity and unicity. This is what,

[1] Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 310.
[2] Thomas J. Farrell, "An Overview of Walter J. Ong's Work," in Bruce E. Gronbeck *et al* (ed.), *Media, Consciousness and Culture. Explorations of Walter Ong's Thought* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1991), 34.
[3] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 81.

according to my point of view, results from an affirmation like this: "it [the spoken word] comes from a region to which we have no direct entry, the personal consciousness of another, the consciousness which utters the mysterious 'I' which means something utterly different from what it means in the mouth of anyone else."[4] Another anthropological concern expressed in Ong's thought respects the way by "which a person feels himself or herself in the cosmos." Such feeling "has evolved in a patterned fashion over the years."[5] This evolution does not drive Ong to consider a cosmological self-sufficiency. In fact, "for him, considering the cosmos includes considering God, the divine ground of being. For without the divine ground of being, nothing would have come into existence."[6]

The two anthropological features of the American linguist are important for our thesis for different reasons. First of all Ong's theological background makes his thought particularly appropriate to an approach to culture that is simultaneously scientifically relevant and theologically grounded. Secondly, considering the human being in the cosmos and that the consciousness of such a situation changes according to the changes happening in the word and its technologies, gives us an appropriate focus to consider how the Internet affects teenagers' consciousness of themselves as creatures of God. Accepting that consciousness and the way we feel in the cosmos change, prevents us from a fixed vision of the human being and, we also take into account Ong's alert: "If God's presence is to be known, it must be found while man is living in a newly arranged constellation of sensory apprehensions."[7] Writing two years after the approval of *Gaudium et Spes*, Ong seems to take seriously the necessity of "scrutinizing the signs of the times."(GS4) We take it as a calling to remember that God makes Godself present in the

[4] Ong, 1967, 315.
[5] Ong, 2002, 174.
[6] Thomas J. Farrell, *Walter Ong's Contributions to Cultural Studies. The Phenomenology of the Word and I-Thou Communication* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2000), 6.
[7] Ong, 1967, 288.

concretion of each person's life and culture. In fact, if we want to understand how teenagers feel themselves in the cosmos, we need to look into the way they are apprehending the reality of the world and of themselves. Having said that, I am not dismissing the need to look for what is permanent in the human beings across time from a Christian perspective. I will do so in the third chapter.

Besides the above-mentioned, aspects there are several other anthropological manifestations and implications of Ong's thought. As a personalist[8] he was influenced by Martin Buber and committed himself to guarantee the possibility of a process of communication where a true presence and encounter might happen. Some of Ong's insights will be mentioned later. Nevertheless, mentioning in the beginning Ong's personalism, I intend to indicate the anthropological concern of my work as its main theological goal.

Walter Ong approaches human consciousness and culture from a "phenomenological" [9] perspective. As a phenomenologist Ong paid attention to how the process of knowledge develops itself within different cultures, considering how the different senses are involved in this process. This focus on the senses allowed Farrell to classify Ong's phenomenology as a "phenomenology of the senses."[10] Describing such a phenomenology is our first step in order to explain the concepts of Ong's work which serve the goal of this thesis.

### 1.1.1 Phenomenology of the Senses

In the beginning of one of the most important books of Ong's middle period,[11] the American Jesuit explains how to describe the task of his phenomenology: "it is useful to think of

[8] Cf. Farrell, 2000, 18.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Farrell, 2000, 7.
[11] Cf. Ibid, 1991, 29-36.

culture in terms of the organization of the sensorium."[12] He also explains what he means by 'sensorium': "the entire sensory apparatus as an operational complex."[13] Thus, according to different ways of organizing the different senses and according to which of the human senses is prevalent and how the different senses are mixed in the process of human knowledge, we will have different stage of psychocultural evolution. These stages are inextricably connected with the human use of the word. Ong considers four different stages[14]: a) primary oral culture, b) manuscript or chirographic culture, c) print or typographic culture, d) second oral culture (essentially literate but the use of electronic media implies a new sensory mix). What unifies these periods is the description of how the "interiorization of literacy"[15] is taking place.

The expression "psychocultural stages" is limited because it can suggest a reduction of human consciousness to its psychological dimension. Human personality structures are more than psychological structures. Nevertheless, the expression allows us to consider a fruitful inseparability between human consciousness and culture and this is one of the most powerful of Ong's insights.

Before analyzing the psychocultural stages, let us have a brief overview about how our relation with the environment can change following the prominence of the different senses. In his essay "'*I See What You Say': Senses Analogues for the Intellect*,"[16] Walter Ong describes two different movements.[17] One movement goes like this: touch-taste-smell-hearing-sight. The other follows the opposite direction from right to left. In a simple way we can say that in the first movement we are going from concretion to abstraction, and in the second we are taking the

[12] Ong, 1967, 6.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Cf. Farrell, 1991, 30.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Walter Ong, "'I see what you say': Senses Analogues for the intellect (1970)," Thomas Farrell and Paul Skoup (ed), *Faith and Contexts,* v.3 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 91-111.
[17] Cf. Ibid, 104-105.

opposite way from abstraction to concretion. Consequently, coming after the first movement our relation with reality will tend to be modeled by a greater formalization and a more objective relation with the world, where all things will tend to be considered as an 'it' and where there is no space for subjectivity and inter-subjectivity (inter-personal relations). In this case we are detached from actual existence. The other way around directs us toward concreteness, subjectivity and inter-subjectivity and places us in an actual extra-subjective existence. These two paths are a good way to sum up Ong's work.

What has just been said is better understood, if we indicate which is the specific relation of each sense with the world. (a) Touch[18]: according to Ong it is in touch (and not in sight) that we find the roots of our sense of objective reality, of our awareness of something existing outside me that is not I. The tendency of a new-born to touch and to grab confirms this statement. (b) Taste:[19] it discriminates what is pleasant from what is unpleasant biologically (e.g. food) or psychologically (e.g. aesthetic). (c) Smell[20]: suggests presences or absences and it is deeply connected with the experience of rejection and attraction. (d) Hearing: according to Ong sound reveals interiority and it "is more real or existential than other sense objects"[21]; e) sight[22]: presenting surfaces and allowing an analytical approach to reality, bringing reality outside us in order to examine it, destroys "its interiority as such."[23]

The main "tension" happening through Ong's researches is between hearing and sight. Around one of these two senses the other will be unified. It is the difference between the ways such unification occurs which decides the move from one psychocultural stage to the following one.

[18] Cf. Ong, 1967, 169.
[19] Cf. Ibid, 117.
[20] Cf. Ibid.
[21] Ibid, 111.
[22] Cf. Ibid, 117.
[23] Ibid, 118.

*a) Primary Oral Cultures*

It is easy to infer that in these cultures knowledge is processed through oral-aural mechanisms. In fact, "oral or nonwriting cultures tend (…) to cast up actuality in comprehensive auditory terms such as voice and harmony."[24]What are the main characteristics of this world? Let me highlight some features underlined by Ong in one of his essays. [25]

Being a world where sound has a major importance, the world of primary oral cultures is dynamic. In this dynamism it plays a peculiar relationship to time because of its evanescence: "sound exists only when it is going out of existence."[26] We cannot hold the sound, catch it or stop it without "destroying" it as a sound. Thus, in its manifestation sound presents itself as an event and not as an object to catch.

This world might also be described as a traditionalist one. This does not imply any kind of intentional option. It is an unavoidable consequence of a specific economy of knowledge. Once all a people's knowledge is stored in spoken and non-written words, their memory cannot afford a lot of innovations. To keep their knowledge safe and stable, they use different forms such as: adages and proverbs.

Another characteristic partially caused by the oral character of the world we are describing is its polemic and highly personal nature. In fact, even if they were able to establish some relations of causality, they did not possess resources which allowed them to think analytically or to develop complex abstractions. Being highly orientated toward concrete life, they tend to consolidate their conceptual and verbal structures through "stories that turn on human action and on interaction of man and man."[27] Besides expressing the "polemic human life struggle,"[28] such

[24] Walter Ong, "World as View and World as Event (1969),"*Faith and Contexts,*1995, 69.
[25] Cf. Ibid, 69-90.
[26] Ong, 2002, 32.
[27] Ong, 1969, 81.
[28] Ibid.

interactions would tend to be "polarized in terms of 'good guys' and 'bad guys'"[29] which made easy the possibility of memorizing these stories.[30] The immediacy of the communitarian and personal presence also favors this conflictive tone. An example of this can be found in the initiation rites and in the process of learning where "youths are often subjected to excruciating physical torment, which gives their new knowledge its requisite agonistic tone."[31] Being strictly related to the proximity of the members of the tribe, this polemic tone of human relations cannot be separated from the "empathetic and participatory"[32] nature of the same human relations of these cultures. From these examples we can find the continuity between what happens with the word and what happens within the culture.

Finally, I would like to mention how the structuring of personality occurs within the cultures we are describing. The first thing to be said is that in these contexts a clear distinction between the individual and the communal, the individual and the group or tribe is not easy. The mere notion of an individual with a private life is totally strange for them. To learn is a communal experience.[33] No member can understand him or herself apart from the group. The group mindset is favored by the unifying characteristic of the sound.

In the background of all these features, how was the word holding them together, how were they organizing their oral expression in order to serve their common goals and to preserve their common knowledge? Briefly it is possible to point out that the way they organized their speech was additive, aggregative and redundant[34] in order to assure an adequate storage of their common patrimony.

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[29] Ibid., 82.
[30] Two good examples of these stories are the Iliad and the Odyssey. Walter Ong refers to them on several occasions as an example of a significant production of Oral Cultures.
[31] Ong, 1969, 82.
[32] Ong, 2002, 44.
[33] Cf. Ibid, 84.
[34] These three features are explained in Ong, 2002, 37-41.

As a whole, all these characteristics build up a world where oral language expressed a deep identification with human life in its present and concrete situation: "*Sound situates man in the middle of actuality and in simultaneity*."[35] From such a place human being is mainly oriented toward action; language was a way of exercising power over reality. Ong often gives the examples of Adam naming the animals (Gen 2:20) to illustrate such power.[36]

*b) Manuscript or Chirographic Culture*

The entire world we just described will change with the technology of writing. Such change has as its epicenter the human consciousness: "More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness."[37]

Moving the word from the world of sound to that of writing affects the discourse that finds a place where it cannot be directly interrogated, as happens with oral speech. This allows Ong to quote Hirsch defending that writing establishes a "context-free" language.[38] It is the separation between the text and the present and concrete human situation that gives birth to such context. It is surely important to stress this separation, especially when one is describing a significant cultural change. Ong does it consistently and his argument is deeply inspirational. Nevertheless, I would like to note that the expression "context-free" seems to me exaggerated. The autonomy of each text is not an absolute. Each text is committed, implicitly or explicitly, totally consciously or not, to the social and cultural context where it was created. It is committed to a concrete human experience. It is separated but not – at least, not always – alienated from the context of its creation and its creator. The reference of a text to reality is what makes it meaningful to read. Each text is not a stranger coming from nowhere.

[35] Ong, 1967, 128. Italic in the original.
[36] Ong, 2002, 33.
[37] Ibid, 77.
[38] Cf. Ibid.

It is important to consider some of the changes derived from writing. The separation from the concrete and present situation, from the "living present" leads to "the reduction of dynamic sound to a quiescent space." Contrasting with oral speech "writing is completely artificial" and, most of the time, a conscious process that "does not inevitably well up out of the unconscious."[39] This contrast can be better understood if we look at the role that our consciousness plays when we are learning to speak, and when we are learning to write. Surely we will recognize that learning to write is a much more intentional process.

The movement we are describing implies a motion in the senses that is crucial in Ong's work. Simply said, all his work was devoted to deeply understand the consequences of this movement: the movement from the aura-oral world to the new sensory world of vision.[40] Such movement implies several consequences: occurring in a context only of words, written words are isolated from an existential context which does not allow the reader to check their meaning with the writer; differently from speech, the writing is a solipsistic activity which isolates the person from the group.

All these distinctive characteristics of the written word give rise to important consequences linked to its inseparability from sight and with major consequences in terms of human consciousness. The necessity to circumscribe the meaning of each word to an exclusive context of words, with a non-immediate connection with an existential context, demands precision, and thus, an ability for analytical clarification. This operation happens with the writer, but also with the reader. This change concerning the word conditions its use not only in a chirographic context but also in an oral context: "once the chirographically initiated feel for precision and

[39] Ibid, 81.
[40] Cf. Ibid, 84.

analytic exactitude is interiorized, it can feed back into speech, and does."[41] Following the discerning feature of sight (opposite to the unifying of sound), writing separates the knower from the known. [42]

> "Writing makes possible increasingly articulate introspectivity, opening the psyche as never before not only to the external objective world quite different from itself but also to the interior self against whom the objective world is set. Writing makes possible the great introspective religious traditions such as Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam."[43]

By itself, this fact allows us to realize the extension of the consequences that a specific technology such as writing can have in human consciousness and in a culture. But it can also lead us to conclude how the changes within our consciousness can have a major influence on our religious experience. If we accept the argument defended by Ong, we will be led to conclude that the self-perception of the interior life which allowed the disciples to follow Jesus is quite different from the one present in our actual approaches to vocational processes. These approaches require an understanding of the interior life as implied by Ong. Nevertheless, we need to check if the continuous changes occurring inside ourselves, due to the changes in the technologies of the word, are not building a different sense of the interior life requiring different approaches. By the end of this thesis I hope to have an answer to such a question.

*c) Print Culture*

The third psychocultural stage radicalizes the consequences of writing. Such radicalization "reinforces and transforms the effects of writing on thought and expression." This reinforcement will be especially – not exclusively - associated with the "shift from sound to visual space." [44] This attachment of the word to a precise space on the surface of the book "suggests that words are

[41] Ibid, 103.
[42] Cf. Ibid, 104.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid, 115.

things far more than writing ever did."[45] We are facing here an important achievement of humanity that is behind some of most significant changes as intellectual developments occurred in the world. In fact, stressing its immobilization in a space, print reinforced the analytical aspect of the word and made it more easily "manipulated." To store considerable amounts of knowledge was not problematic anymore. Together with other factors this situation allowed a considerable development of science. All manner of organizing thought was changing. The books, their indexes, their labels allowed human beings to classify reality which seems less threatening. All this new way of *seeing* reality corresponds to a reification of the word.[46] The fixed character of a book also brings out the concept of a noetic closure. [47] The idea of a corpus of knowledge starts to develop and it is connected with the concept of text books.

Other transformations were simultaneously occurring. The Protestant Reformation, but also Catholic practices were definitively influenced by such a fact. In the first case the contact with the Bible was a significant fact. In the latter, a more solid idea of doctrine was allowed by the concretion of the printed catechism. The experience of private and silent reading contributes to the idea of private life and it is one of the cultural manifestations of individualism, what reinforces the self reflexivity and thus the contact with the individual consciousness. This fact was specially reflected in romantic literature and in its heroes. The printed word also allows to such literature the creation of the concept of creativity which stressed a much more definitive sense of individual authorship.

In the middle of all these changes, I would like to mention one more aspect decisively influential in the way we are present to the world and to ourselves: the change in our own perception of time. The concept of calendar and an increasingly more measured time is, clearly, a

[45] Ibid, 116.
[46] Cf. Ibid, 121.
[47] Cf. Ibid, 129.

consequence of print and of other technological developments. Naturally, this changed our inner perception of time, the way we plan our lives, but also the way we organize information inside us. "Before writing was deeply interiorized by print, people did not feel themselves situated every moment of their lives in abstract computed time of any sort."[48]

Even if not for significant parts of the population, we can say that, within this period, words were at hand, ready to be possessed and manipulated. This fact is connected with one of the most assertive critiques Ong makes of a world exclusively known by the perspective of sight: the depersonalization of the word that happens when the word is essentially considered as a thing.

*d) Second Oral Culture*

The electronic technologies of the word (e.g. telephone, radio, television, and computer) "deepened the commitment of the word to space" but also "brought consciousness to a new age of secondary orality."[49]

The best way to understand what is happening in this stage is to compare it with the primary oral culture. As the first oral culture, so the second one allows a strong participatory sense and reinforces the sense of group, the communal dimension. It does so by allowing the experience of being an audience to be significantly different from the individual experience of reading. In fact, in its beginnings to hear the radio or to hear and see television were familiar and communal experiences. Besides that, together with personal encounters allowed by the phone, these technologies foster a "concentration in the present moment."[50]

The main differences between the second oral culture and the primary oral culture are directly related with the gains of the interiorization of the technologies of the word, namely writing and print. Due to the development of self-consciousness the processes of communication

[48] Ong, 2002, 96.
[49] Ibid, 133.
[50] Ibid, 134.

are much more intentional and deliberate. Belonging to a group is less the result of inevitability – as in the tribes – and more the result of a personal conscious option. We are facing here a special ability to plan and program perfectly described by Ong:

> "Unlike members of a primary oral culture, who are turned outward because they have little occasion to turn inward, we are turned outward because we have turned inward. In a like vein, where primary orality promotes spontaneity because the analytic reflectiveness implemented by writing is unavailable, second orality promotes spontaneity because through analytic reflection we have decided that spontaneity is a good thing. We plan our happenings to be sure that they are thoroughly spontaneous."[51]

There are two specific features of print culture that are maintained by the second oral culture. The closure of the printed book is maintained by the electronic mass media. In fact, before the time of interactivity, an interaction capable of changing what someone was saying in a TV or radio program would not be possible. Another characteristic of print culture that Ong sees – at least in part – preserved by second orality is intimacy. And that is not only true for telephone, "even radio and television are not entirely lacking in intimacy (particularly television), because of the degree of audience involvement it fosters."[52] Ong gives the example of the impact of the assassination of President Kennedy to demonstrate how a public affair might affect inwardly the life of such a large audience.

Walter Ong has a very optimistic approach to second oral culture. His optimism is in part due to his conviction that second oral culture would be able to rescue the word from its depersonalization. Such depersonalization occurred because writing and print contributed to a too excessively objective vision of the world. Ong believed that second orality was fostering the possibility of truly personal encounters where sight was not the only sense in play. Even if we tend to think that not all of his expectations were fulfilled, we believe that Ong's approach is inspiring not only because of its accuracy, but also because it forces us to approach culture

[51] Ibid.
[52] Ong, 1967, 292.

looking forward to find where the possibilities for human enrichment are, where the possibilities for a true encounter are. We will explore these two features in the following sections.

The time on which Walter Ong was reporting when he described the fourth stage is quite different from the time we are living now. The changes are significant enough to consider a new stage that Ong did not consider in his work. In the second chapter I will propose some possible approaches to this new stage of psychocultural development.

### 1.1.2 Interiorization of Technology

We tend to consider technology and its artifacts as tools. Consequently, we regard technology as something exterior to us. Walter Ong totally dismisses such an idea. He gives as an example the musical instrument. According to him a musician experiences his/her instrument as part of him or herself. A musician interiorizes her/his instrument.[53] Last year, I taught music students and I could verify the accuracy of this example. Nevertheless, Ong goes further: "technology is still more intimately connected with ourselves and our own interior life than even a musical instrument suggests." For the American linguist the major effect of technology, "its most real presence" does not happen "in the external world but within the mind, within the consciousness."[54]

At first glance it might seem easier to identify all the changes occurring outside ourselves concerning the use of technology. But, as was shown previously in this thesis, technologies have an enormous impact inside us, "the more we transform the external world, the more we transform our own interior lives."[55] Technologies change the balance of the "mixture of

[53] Cf. Walter Ong, "Technology Outside Us and Inside Us (1978)" Thomas Farrell and Paul Skoup (ed.), *Faith and Contexts,* v. 1 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), 189-191.
[54] Ibid, 191.
[55] Ibid.

insideness and outsideness"[56] which characterizes the human being. In primary oral cultures, the outside prevailed, but writing and print allowed human beings to turn inside and to grow in self-consciousness and self-reflexiveness. From this results a clearer distinction between the individual and the communal structures with which she/he interacts and, consequently a different way of self-articulation.[57] Naturally, this is a slow process: "reflectiveness and articulateness about the self take time to grow."[58] This is true not only from a historical perspective considering human evolution as a species, but also to each individual in his/her life development.

As a species and as an individual growing in self-awareness, the human being has more control of his/her life. Consequently, the human being progressively changes the ways he/she feels him/herself within the universe, which is deeply connected with the self-image. "To this extent, technology is here an interiorized phenomenon, something registered inside man."[59]

How this process of the interiorization of technology changed and enlarged our noetic processes, was patent when we described the manuscript culture and the print culture. There, it was clear how our ability to store knowledge and to access it increased significantly. Ong associates knowledge, self-awareness and freedom. Freedom naturally, is deeply linked with our consciousness. All these connections are essential to keep technology from dehumanizing us. "Freedom demands knowledge. A free act is one which proceeds from one's own interior."[60] The consciousness is the place where knowledge, self-reflectiveness and free action meet. Knowing the possible options, the consequences of such options and their motives is an interior act, an act of consciousness. The thickness and density of an act like this would not be possible, following

[56] Ibid.
[57] The way technology is presently fostering the balance between our insideness and our outsideness, is undoubtedly an important topic for reflection. In the third chapter, analyzing teenagers' use of the technologies of relationship we will return to this subject. At that time we will highlight how the perception of what is private and what is public is changing.
[58] Ong, 2002, 174.
[59] Ong, 1978, 193.
[60] Ibid, 201.

Ong, without the interiorization of the technology of writing: "Artificiality is natural to human beings. Technology properly interiorized does not degrade human life but on the contrary enhances it."[61]

### 1.1.3 World as View and World as Event[62]

I already alluded to the main tension present in Walter Ong's work: the tension between hearing and sight, between sound and writing used as central metaphors of our understanding of the world. I am returning to this point in order to show how Ong overcomes this tension and to indicate how such a method might be fruitful to our own work.

The expression world view "reflects the marked tendency of technologized man to think of actuality as something essentially picturable and to think of knowledge itself by analogy with visual activity to the exclusion, more or less, of the other senses."[63] This is not only valid to explain how the human being receives the world, how the world is being imprinted on her/him – as if she/he was a passive receptor – but it also implies an understanding of how human beings construct the world, how human beings interpret the world. What might be the problem of such exaggeration of sight? Writing and print "moved" the word from the world of sound to the field of vision. The world, as an image, is a now a fixed reality. If we recall that, radicalizing the effects of writing, print contributed to the reification of the world, to the consideration of reality as something to be manipulated, we will understand what might be the effect of the described exaggeration: a much too objective comprehension of reality where subjectivity has no place. Sight tends to analyze and discriminate. Before it everything tends to be an object.

[61] Ong, 2002, 82.
[62] I am using the same title used by Walter Ong in of his essays. Cf. note 24, p. 10.
[63] Ibid, 1969, 69.

What has just been said affects human communication, namely through the media. In a world exclusively understood as a view, communication is seen only as "expressing things."[64] Expressed as things, thoughts, information or emotions do not lead us to an experience of "person-to-person communication as a communing of the human spirit."[65] The "hypertrophy of the visual" objectifies the human-life world.[66] Consequently, according to Ong "we have maximized the 'it' and minimized the 'I' and the 'thou'."[67]

By contrast with the reification produced by sight, sound, since it is dynamic, is considered by Ong as an event.[68] Considering the word as an event, as something evanescent, we cannot manipulate it, we cannot hold it. We already underlined that sound reveals interiority and so is able to be perceived as an interior reality. Thus, sound is capable of liberating us from the objectifying tendency of sight and it is also able to place us in the present, inside a concrete situation. In a way different from primary oral cultures, today this might be an intentional process. Our reflectiveness opened that door.

Such intentionality is decisive to overcome the irreconcilable opposition between the world as view and the world as an event. In fact, "we can expand our world-as-view sense of life to include a greater sense of the unfolding of history in the present moment."[69] More than looking for a synthesis of the two approaches to the world, we need "to experience the two simultaneously."[70] In sum, Walter Ong does not defend, under any circumstances, an idyllic

[64] Farrell, 2000, 3.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Cf. Ong, 1967, 288.
[67] Ibid, 289.
[68] Ong restricts the meaning of the biblical Hebrew expression *dabar* to word and event. Such restriction is authorized by some of the significances attributed to this word in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, we must say that Ong makes a significant restriction on the meaning of a polysemic word in order to stress his intentions.
[69] Farrell, 2000, 14.
[70] Ibid.

return to the oral world and a dismissal of writing. Contrary to some "romantic illusions,"[71] those who lived in primary oral cultures were not more adjusted to the world or living a pacific relation with nature. In fact, our reflectiveness might lead us today to be more sensitive to the presence revealed by the voice. The key to overcome the opposition between sight and hearing is given by a consciousness available to open itself to a presence. This movement of openness will be crucial to the analysis we will do of what is happening within teenagers' culture today.

### 1.1.4 World-as-Presence

Ong's personalism was implicitly present throughout what we have been saying. But it would be impossible to end an overview of his thought without stating it in a clearer way. Thomas Farrell, an Ong expert, considered that the larger project of Ong's work is a "philosophy of the human person, which includes a philosophy of communication, consciousness and culture."[72] It is true that Ong discloses the human being and the human consciousness showing us how culture is conditioning what we are. But, to consider the philosophy of the human person as the larger framework which includes the smaller ones, reveals to us what the priority is.[73] This clear priority impels Ong to overcome the opposition between sight and hearing. Only through such overcoming is a true encounter possible: "I believe that another productive way to supplement our concept of world view is to move from the concept of world senses to the concept of world-as-presence. By presence I mean the kind of relationship that exists when we say that two persons are present to one another." [74]

[71] Cf. Ong, 1967, 292.
[72] Farrell, 2000, 7.
[73] Ong's method of taking culture as the starting point to build up his philosophy of the human person, serves the purpose of this thesis of working with an anthropology from below.
[74] Ong, 1969, 89.

Addressing his present situation (second oral culture) Ong looks for what conditions are being given to the human being allowing him to experience the encounter. For him, the re-flourishing of oral-aural communications allowed by the new electronic media made it possible to live "a sense of personal presence which is a new and invigorating human experience."[75] A human being would not be present to him/herself if he/she was not provoked by the presence of another. We find ourselves in our relations that: "the presence of other persons fills man's consciousness as objects cannot."[76]

Ong is enthusiastically optimistic concerning the unity of the human being that has been fostered by the new communication processes. He saw the possibilities that had been opened up for outside groups, "who formerly were often spurned, feared, and even massacred, have today become in many if not all sectors of technological society the objects of unprecedented concern."[77] Today – even recognizing that our new media (e.g. social networks, namely Facebook) allow a significant exposure of minorities, sometimes significantly empowering them[78] - we are not so optimistic. Nevertheless, it is useful to identify where Ong found the cultural conditions for human encounter, for a truly I-Thou communication.

The presence of a human being to her/himself and to one another is, for Ong, the "presence of the word."[79] He recognizes a sense of urgent presence given by the "omnipresence" of the voice that fills the air and opens new possibilities: "The sound media create in quite evident, if limited, ways a more fully open society. Radio and television bring with them the open-end discussion, the dialogue."[80] In a certain excess of optimism not totally confirmed by the development of the media culture, Ong characterizes this time as irenic and open. This affected

[75] Ong, 1967, 295.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid, 297.
[78] Besides all its contradictions the Arab spring is a good example.
[79] Ong, 1967, 298.
[80] Ibid, 298-299.

society as a whole, the personal and the "institutional" consciousness. Ong sees the Second Vatican Council as an expression of such effect. The dialogical consciousness is an achievement of the second oral culture: "Today's openness is unmistakably associated with vocal exchange. Dialogue constitutes the basic use of the spoken word." [81] In the second oral culture this dialogical openness does not undermine, according to Ong, the possibilities of intimacy won by the print culture: "Today intimacy must coexist with greater openness. It is distinctive of matured technological man that he must and can maintain a large number of contacts which are decently personal and relatively noncommittal."[82] The reference to intimacy is especially important since that will be an important topic for discussion in our next chapter. In fact, the way the Internet is shaping our intimacy is one of the most controversial topics of discussion nowadays. Even if we are not totally conscious of exactly what terms, a new personality structure of intimacy is being built up.

Ong considered the structures arising as a consequence of the new communication technologies as "cooperative structures."[83] He says that we are not aware of all the possibilities of such structures because we continue "to consider the universe as a world-in-space and only as a world-in-space, as essentially something picturable." But, "picturability is not the measure of the world."[84] This temptation is especially present when we consider the presence in its external dimension, by our capacity to attach it to a concrete space. Nevertheless, this is not what the presence is all about. "A presence is an interiority bearing toward and calling to another interior, an in-wardness which is simultaneously an utterance or 'outerence' or 'outering' insofar as the

[81] Ibid, 300.
[82] Ibid, 303,
[83] Ibid, 308.
[84] Ibid.

other is outside."[85] Such presence manifests itself through the voice which is: "the call of one interior through an exterior to another interior."[86]

This way of conceiving presence cannot be separated from the Word of God. Ong assumes such a background and underlines Jesus as the Word of God. There is no doubt that God's presence is essentially perceived as an interior Presence even if we cannot dismiss the exterior signs of God's presence (e.g. community, sacraments). The oral-aural relation between God and the human creature is surely present throughout the Scriptures. Consequently the spoken word, as a word that we cannot hold, as a word that presents itself as an event, is an appropriate word to understand God's initiative to call us for a personal relationship and our answer to that call. We are created in the Image of God. Jesus Christ reveals to us what that means. So, we cannot dismiss sight as a bridge through which we can find God and especially through which God can find us. Nevertheless, in a world overcrowded with images the art of listening might be an important path to experience God's communication to each one of us. It is curious to note that – as far as I know – there is no correspondent in the hearing field to what an *Idol* is in the sight semantic field. The most important thing is not to forget that the first initiative belongs to God: "Encounter is an action à deux. Insofar as it is a giving of a person to a person it is a free act. In this sense attention to the spoken word, however intents cannot bring God to manifest himself."[87]

There is no doubt that Ong reveals us essentially the possibilities of technology, its ability to enlarge the human spirit. This does not mean that he is blind to technology's ambiguities. But he believes that "the depersonalizing elements in technological society are often exaggerated."[88] He goes further and says: "There is no indication that the kind of communication

[85] Ibid, 309.
[86] Ibid, 309.
[87] Ibid, 294.
[88] Ibid, 302-303.

fostered in our electronic world is particularly dehumanizing or antireligious if one compares it with the actuality of earlier communications."[89]

### 1.2 Personal synthesis: what to keep from Ong's thought

A major part of Ong's work was developed in a world quite different from ours concerning the development of electronic media. The changes occurred with the advent of the Internet and with all the communication tools associated with such advent, which were not covered by Ong. Nevertheless, Ong's insights can help us to hear the "signs of the times." In order to achieve such a goal, before moving to the next chapter, I would like to sum up what I intend to preserve from Ong's thought in order to understand how teenagers are being shaped by the use of social networks and blogs.

The first insight to preserve from Ong's work is the method he uses in his approach to human consciousness. Ong, not forgetting his anthropological goal, first directs his attention toward culture. Going from culture to the human consciousness he was able to understand technology not as a mere tool, but as an interiorized force which changes the way human beings experience themselves in the world. Using a diachronic perspective – from primary oral cultures to second oral cultures – Ong shows that our interiority is not a fixed reality. In this specific point he assumes Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's influence: "'interiority' is not an entirely isolated phenomenon but rather constitutes the definitive breakthrough following on a series of preparatory breakthroughs into interiority."[90] Interiority is part of the history of our human, biological and cosmological evolution. This resonates with Karl Rahner's statement: "materiality in time as pre-history of man in his reflexive freedom must be understood as orientated towards

[89] Ibid, 304.
[90] Ong, 196,. 179.

the history of the human spirit."[91] From here we can deduce interiority as a dynamic dimension of the human being which, certainly, is not separate from God's continuous creative care for each human being. But it cannot also be separated from the culture and its dynamics. Looking to a teenager's situation this will oblige us not to ask what kind of interiority we want to foster in them, but to be perspicacious enough to find what interiority is God fostering in them through our present cultural situation.

As we said in the beginning of this chapter, for Ong consciousness is the core of the human being, the core of interiority. All we read from Ong leads us to conclude that consciousness is essentially the place where major human tasks happen. In fact, here human knowledge and self-reflexiviness serve the purpose of human freedom. Here happens the mix of the senses responsible for our perception of the world. In its identification with interiority, consciousness cannot be separated from culture. Once we accept that a teenager's construction of identity is a "lifelong reflexive project"[92], we will need to understand what is happening in their consciousness to understand such a project. Following Ong's insights we will also need to figure how the mixture of insideness and outsideness is happening in the context we are studying.

Insisting on the idea of sound as an event, Ong underlined its inapprehensible character. Associating the spoken word to human personal encounters he was able to call our attention to what is inapprehensible in the human being, in her/his resistence to be apprehended by any concept. He does it by calling us to preserve what is essential and humanizing in human interactions. It can also be helpful to distinguish the voice that calls us to an encounter from the noise (which differently from the sound, I would say, is persistent and not evanescent).

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[91] Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 184

[92] M. Lövheim, «Young people and the use of internet as a transitional space», in *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet 1.1*, (2005). *http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/volltexte/2005/5826/pdf/Loevheim3.pdf* Accessed on July 20th 2012.

Simultaneously, Ong's insistence on expanding our perception of the world beyond the field of sight, keeps us alert to the necessity to discern what is excessive in our culture of image. Ong's personalism is, surely, something to keep.

Finally, I would like to suggest a warning. It concerns a specific danger to our relation with God. Being so focused on seeing what is happening in human consciousness, we can forget that in such a relationship the first and priority initiative is from God. We need to attend to the conditions to receive God present in our culture. But God is bigger than such conditions. This would be similar to the psychological temptation of looking for the ideal psychological conditions to experience God properly, forgetting that God is not limited by such conditions.

Ong's insights previously underlined will be decisive to our approach to teenager culture that we will do in the following chapter.

## **2.** The Culture of Self Disclosure – Reflections on Teenagers' Reality in Ongian Terms

> *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now.* (Rom 8:19.22)

In this chapter Walter Ong's concepts will help us to verify how teenagers are apprehending the reality of the world and themselves and to establish how their interior life is being shaped, namely concerning their perceptions as creatures of God. The shape of teenagers' inner lives cannot be separated from the way their identity is being developed. Identity is the appropriate frame where a narrow look into interiority might take place.

### 2.1 Adolescence and Identity Formation

In the last chapter we mentioned the fact that interiority should be considered as a dynamic dimension of human beings. This is true from a phylogenetic and from an ontogenetic perspective. Thus, such dynamism cannot be separated from the personal development of identity. What happens with teenagers concerning the development of their identity might be seen from different perspectives. I will expose two.

Erik Erikson played an important role concerning the importance attributed to adolescence as a moment of identity formation. He considered that teenagers need a "moratorium for the integration of the identity elements ascribed in the foregoing to the childhood stages."[93] This implies a tension between the inner and external world in order to achieve an *ego identity* which requires the confidence that "one's ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity (…) is matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others."[94] According to Erikson, the budding of identity requires the previous development, during childhood, of a "separate

[93] Erik Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968), 128.
[94] Erik Erikson, "Identity and the Life Cycle. Selected Papers by Erik H. Erikson," in *Psychological Issues* Vol. I, no. 1 (New York: International Universities Press, 1959), 89.

identity,"[95] which often needs to be defended from an overidentification with parents.[96] According to Erikson a similar overidentification might temporally happen during adolescence "with the heroes of cliques and crowds"[97] due to role confusion. Fighting for their individual identity implies autonomy. Referring to what democracy might provide teenagers concerning this process; Erikson says it should "emphasize autonomy in the form of independence and initiative in the form of constructive work."[98]

Janet Surrey participated in relevant research concerning women's psychological development. The main concept she developed in the theory of women's development is the notion of "self-in-relation." Such a notion implies "an important shift in emphasis from separation to relationship as the basis for self-experience and development."[99] A criticism of Erikson is implied here concerning the importance given by him to separation and autonomy. According to Surrey it is within the context of relationships that the others aspects, namely autonomy, are developed. Studying mother-daughter relationships as the model to analyze relationships, Surrey points out three key stages in this relationship. First she considers the mutual openness in the relationship as the "beginning stage for the development of self-in-relation." Then she underlines the "child's increasing capacity for mutual empathy." Finally, she refers to "mutual empowerment" [100] as a path of taking care of the relationship, of mutual responsibility and of promoting the other's development. Surrey is not supposing an identification between self and other. In fact, describing empathy she assures that it "involves a complex process of interactive

[95] Ibid, 90.
[96] Cf. Ibid.
[97] Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1963), 262.
[98] Erikson, 1968, 133.
[99] Janet Surrey, "The Self-in-Relation: A Theory of Women's Development," in Janet Surrey et al. *Women's Growth in Connection. Writings from the Stone Center* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1991), 57.
[100] Ibid, 56.

validation of the differences between the self and other."[101] This means that the differentiation also happens within the relationship and not as separation, which is not to deny the need of physical separation and of being alone.

These two models of discussing identity imply also two conceptions of interior life. In this thesis I assume that interior life cannot be separated from our relational dimension and in that sense I am closer to Surrey. Our inner dialogue presupposes always a Thou and it is informed by our relationships. But I also maintain as important the difference between outsideness – insideness, as essential to distinguish self and other. The mysterious "I" uttered by each personal consciousness needs to be sustained[102]. Studying the technologies of relationship we will now see how they might affect teenagers' interior lives.

## 2.2 Technologies of Relationship[103] and Teenagers' Identity

Technologies of relationship include all kinds of different tools. In this chapter I am using such a concept to indicate the main ways through which teenagers communicate with one another and with their families and through which they express themselves and their creativity (e.g. cell phones, social networks such as facebook). I will specially underline the activities which implicate some level of personal disclosure either to people they know or to an open audience.

It is quite a hard task getting close to this cultural reality. It is hard specially when we are living within it but, at the same time, we partially feel ourselves as strangers to it. Nevertheless, as José Correia, a Portuguese theologian, suggests following E. Salmann: "like the Emmaus

[101] Ibid, 58.
[102] Cf. note 4, p. 6.
[103] The expression is used by Turkle, 157.

disciples we should 'invite' to our house what is strange, what we do not understand."[104] This approach to culture allows us to face what Michael Paul Gallagher considers to be the central task of systematic theology: "to understand revelation anew in the light of the sensibilities and questions of our changing history."[105] This does not mean that we intend to have a naïve approach to this reality, but that we believe in God's presence in our present context. Only by approaching such a situation without any previous judgments can we find its wounds and discover the hidden doors through which God is communicating Godself and through which people are experiencing their thirst for God. Like the Samaritan we need to make ourselves neighbors to youth culture in order to discover teenagers as our neighbors. We will approach this context helped by Walter Ong's concepts.

### 2.2.1 The Presence of the Word

The Internet (but also other tools such as cell phones) decisively contribute to the emergence of a new space of communication. To understand how these technologies are transforming the presence of the word and consequently the way society is holding together, we need to understand how the new space of communications works and how the word is being used in such space.

Interactivity[106] is considered to be one of the main characteristics of this space. Such interactivity allows it to be an *open* space where, contrary to print culture, the word is not

[104] Elmar Salmann as quoted by José F. Correia, "Crer na Fronteira. Habitar Novas Fronteiras," Public Lecture given at VIII *Semana de Estudos de Espiritualidade Inaciana* (Fátima: 6th to 8th December 2008). Printed version given by the author. My translation.
[105] Michael P. Gallagher, "La Fe a la Búsqueda de Nuevos Lenguajes Hoy," Public Lecture (Santiago de Compostela, September, 4th 2006) Printed version given by the author. The title is in Spanish, but the lecture was given in English.
[106] Marc C. Santos, *Toward Another Rhetoric: Web 2.0, Levinas, and Taking Responsibility for Response Ability*. *A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Purdue University* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University, 2009), 29-54. In these pages the author analyzes what he considers to be the three values of Web 2.0: 1) Interactivity, 2) Plurality, 3) Transience and risk.

associated with a context of noetic closure (e.g. the book). Interactivity (and openness, as well) contribute to the passage from a passive audience to agency. In fact, using the Internet people are not only looking for content, reading, seeing or hearing, but also creating new contents.[107]

For Marc C. Santos the most important of all is that interactivity is changing the nature of human encounters. When users experience interactivity they are: "encountering the presence of another user as a verb acting upon myself and the fruits of my prosuming labor."[108] Building on Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy, Santos considers that users of Web 2.0 are being exposed to "the transformative power of experiencing other people as people, rather than as identification or characters 'materialized' through conscious interpretations of texts."[109] But how are these encounters going on? How are the word and the different senses present in such encounters?

The first thing we can say is that the possibility of being in contact with other persons is virtually present at every moment. In fact the technologies of connection allow people to be "always on,"[110] always connected to the network. Such constant connection shapes decisively teenagers' relationships. The physical separation from parents and peers is now breaking down by social networks, Instant Messaging[111] (IM) and texting messages and calling through cell phones. Naturally, for parents, this constitutes a security and gives them the impression of being in control. For teenagers this means that, even if having a cell phone gives them more freedom to move, it will be hard to "have the experience of being alone with only him or herself to count on."[112] It is not surprising that some of them might feel as the teenagers quoted by Turkle: "I feel

[107] Santos uses the expression *pro*suming in order to describe the activity of producing and consuming internet contents. The choice of this expression seems to imply a certain reduction to the productive and consumerist dimensions of the human being. Cf. Santos, 30.
[108] Santos, 30.
[109] Ibid, 35.
[110] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together. Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 151 – 170. This expression is used as the title of the 8th chapter.
[111] Internet Programs such as Windows Live Messenger.
[112] Turkle, 173.

trapped and less independent"[113] or might express some comprehensible concerns: "if it is always possible to be in touch, when does one have the right to be alone?"[114] If the experience of private and silent reading contributed to the emergence of private life and thus for an awareness of inner life, we might ask if the personal awareness of interior life is not being challenged by the near impossibility of being alone. In my recent experience as a teacher, I noticed how, for some of my teenage students, it was difficult to read a text silently and connect it with their interior lives.

The fact of being "always on" also affects peer relationships. Concerning the concrete use of the word in these relations it is possible to find a tension between voice (phone or presence) and text (messaging and texting). According to testimonies of different teenagers, a voice is considered "as demanding too much"[115] once it implies full attention to the other person. The tone of voice makes it difficult to hide what we do not want to show, it exposes us, "it reveals too much."[116] Texting through a cell phone or messaging through a service of IM is more helpful because, according to a teenager quoted by Turkle, "I'm not bound to anything, no commitment.… I have control over the conversation and also more control over what I say."[117] The text seems to be a barrier which allows teenagers to hide and protect themselves from the danger of nonchalance when they expose their feelings. This barrier might be helpful for shy people who are able to express themselves using a tool which defends them from an immediate answer (contrary to phone and presence) and gives them a place "to reflect, retype, and edit."[118]

Such advantages do not veil the fact that the ties resulting from a text-based relationship fail in their consistency. According to Turkle, "we communicate in a new language of

[113] Ibid, 174.
[114] Ibid, 173.
[115] Ibid, 188.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid, 190.
[118] Teenager quoted by Turkle, 187.

abbreviation in which letters stand for words and emoticons for feelings."[119] The lack of consistency is clear with the example of apologies: "I don't apologize to people anymore. I just put my excuses on as my status [referring to Facebook]."[120] Our accountability for the other seems undermined. This is recognized by some teenagers who acknowledge that texting an apology is easier than saying it, but saying it makes it easier to forgive because it is easier to trust in the other's honesty. Turkle assures us that the distinction between the voice and the text is, in this case, that the voice and the presence allow the experience of empathy as the anteroom of forgiveness.[121] Taking empathy in its literal meaning we would say that it means entering into the other's suffering. Thus, the voice seems to have a notable ability to evoke our consciousness, to invite us to recognize the other as a neighbor, the other's interiority. In Ong's terms we would say that we find here a significant example of the spoken word as an event. In our present situation, preserving the voice seems to be important if we want to preserve the possibility of hearing "the call of one interior through an exterior to another interior."[122]

Santos reminds us that "the key condition of hospitality for Levinas is responsibility."[123] The omnipresent interactivity allowed by being "always on" does not always help teenagers take seriously the responsibility of welcoming the other into their lives. The example of the teenager apologizing through Facebook makes clear how sometimes it is hard to bear the heaviness of our ties.[124] It is important to recognize that the concrete use of technologies of communications by teenagers is wounding their interior life and their ability to recognize others and relatedness as constitutive of such interior life.

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[119] Turkle, 19.
[120] Teenager quoted by Turkle, 233.
[121] Cf. Turkle, 234.
[122] Ong, 1967, 309.
[123] Santos, 101.
[124] Cf. José F. Correia, "Inácio e os Exercícios Espirituais em tempos de 'Morangos com Açúcar,'" in *Brotéria* 162 (2006), 515.

It is impossible not to feel some perplexity with what has been described. But we need to go further. To communicate, to express words always says something about the one who uses the word. What are teenagers trying to say about themselves through all these connections? What moves them?

Living in a particularly instable time of their personal development, teenagers try to make sense of their lives. Part of this effort implies accepting a significant level of tentativeness. When teenagers express themselves through the creation of a blog or a profile in a social network, when they text a message, they are testing different possibilities for the self, searching for different paths, looking (as we all do and we all need) for recognition. Such attempts can progressively be integrated into their personal and social narratives. Teenagers intuitively know they cannot do it for themselves, consequently "self-inquiry is not conducted in isolation, but rather in the context of, and through feedback from, meaningful others."[125] For a significant proportion of contemporary teenagers to have such feedback they must be online.

Trying to develop their personalities, teenagers expose themselves to others. Sometimes it is possible to assume a kind of roleplay where we try to adjust our performance to what others expect of us, by assuming the mask we think will be better received and applauded:

> "Making an avatar and texting. Pretty much the same. You're creating your own person; you don't have to think of things on the spot rellay, which a lot of people can't really do. You're creating your own little ideal person and sending it out. Also on Internet, with sites like MySpace and Facebook, you put up things you like about yourself, and you're not going to advertise the bad aspects of you."[126]

[125] Susannah Stern, "Producing Sites, Exploring identities: Youth Online Authorship," in David Buckingham *Youth, Identity and Digital Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 97.
[126] Teenager quoted by Turkle, 191.

This performance of the 'I' is lived within a youth culture where music and sports idols cultivate a fan mentality. Lived in the relationships among peers, such a mentality might lead to unconscious confusion between to be or to have a friend and to be or to have a fan.[127]

But it is also possible that we expose our weaknesses in order to understand how others will deal with that. Susannah Stern presents a concrete case of a girl who after first admitting her weaknesses online was, afterwards, capable of admitting them in her offline relationships: "Right from the beginning I was more honest in the blog than I ever was in real life. And since it's gone on, I've kind of become more honest to catch up with in my own life."[128] This was possible after this girl realized that her weaknesses were acceptable to her audience. As a consequence she changed her personality, becoming more sincere about herself with her friends. Revealing her vulnerability she was able to open herself to live in a more fruitful way.

The present technologies of the word are not only, as we saw before, changing the way others are present to me but also the way I present myself to others. This presentation is being played out before an audience partially or mostly unknown. It is important to note that the assumption "that everyone is watching you and is concerned with your behavior and appearance as you are yourself"[129] which Elkind calls *imaginary audience,* manifests a normal tendency among adolescents to be self-centered and to expect acceptance. This attitude reveals the density of their self-consciousness through which they try to process all the changes they are going through. Nevertheless, present technologies of communication transform such an imaginary audience into an unknown audience. This audience is unknown concerning its extension and intentions but, yet, it is real. The increasing consciousness of the reality of this audience might

[127] Cf. Turkle, 168.
[128] Teenage girl quoted by Stern, 110.
[129] David Elkind, *All Grown Up and No Place to Go. Teenagers in Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1998 – Revised Edition) 40.

transform what was a healthy play of a work-in-progress self into a self habituated to anxiety and dissatisfaction and always looking for approval, always able to re-edit his or her life. Turkle, referring herself to the psychoanalytic tradition, reminds us that narcissism might be used "not to indicate people who love themselves, but a personality so fragile that it needs constant support."[130]

What does this way of presenting the self reveal and conceal to teenagers about who they are as human beings or, from a Christian perspective, who they are as creatures? The temptation of performing an ideal "I" might separate them from the recognition of their own limits and flaws and make them believe that they are the exclusive authors of their lives. The wound of narcissism is a real possibility. Simultaneously, the consciousness of the importance of acceptance by others and the need of a strength that does not come from me to support my life might help them to recognize their vulnerability. Recognizing this vulnerability might be a door open to something or someone bigger than themselves. The desire to be alone expressed by some teenagers might be an important sign that they need time to carry on this vulnerability. Being aware of this vulnerability, not fearing it, they might listen and recognize the presence of others, recognizing them as neighbors. We need to be alone to recognize it, but vulnerability is a relational concept. We are always vulnerable before someone.

### 2.2.2 Interiorization of the Technologies of Relationship

Through the use of technologies such as the Internet it is not difficult to recognize how the consciousness is exposed to a significant and plural number of self manifestations and to an increasing amount of information. This plurality[131] of self-manifestations cannot be separated

[130] Turkle, 177.
[131] Cf. note 106, p. 32.

from the technologies. It allowed an all new set of manifestations permitting people to form and reach their own audiences presenting ideas or artistic creations without any prior consent of a TV or radio editor. The music industry is a good example. YouTube allowed the public exposition of some young musical groups which, after building their own audience through internet tools, were accepted into the industry.[132] This plurality is also manifest in the impossibility of trying to build a fixed image of reality or of the human being: "we're no longer forced to carefully construct a single shared path through memory."[133] The challenge of the ideas of hierarchy and order which occurred with Modernity seems to be radicalized through the Internet as a paradigmatic expression of Postmodernity. How is consciousness, while interiorizing technology, coping with this fluid reality?

We already saw that, according to Ong, technologies change the balance of the "mixture of insideness and outsideness."[134] Growing in self-consciousness and self-reflexiveness was a long historical process and it is also a complex personal process. How is the balance outside-inside happening in teenagers' lives?

A significant example to understand how teenagers are balancing these two dimensions of their lives is look at the way they are sharing their emotions, how they are processing them. In her book Turkle gives different examples concerning the urgency felt by teenagers to immediately share a feeling when they have it. Texting such feeling they submit themselves to a kind of "poll" among their friends and anxiously wait for their answers: "I want the response, like, right away."[135] We might find here a concrete form of coping with feeling by trying to understand or validate them through what Turkle calls a "collaborative self."[136] But this also might lead to

[132] In Portugal I assisted in this phenomenon.
[133] Weinberger quoted by Santos, 41.
[134] Ong, 1978, 191.
[135] Teenager quoted by Turkle, 176.
[136] Turkle, 176.

viewing self-expression as a substitute for self-reflection, not allowing teenagers to build their interior resources and inwardly process their own feelings. The increasing complexity of the world coincides with the lessening of time to think without interruption.[137] Occasionally, this could contribute to a constant demand for new feelings. As Turkle explains it, we move from "'I have a feeling, I want to make a call [or text]' to 'I want to have a feeling, I make a call."[138] What seems to be reflected here is a cultural tendency of youth to live always intensively, to be always experiencing new feelings. But, what strikes my attention more is the possibility of losing the outside-inside balance, displacing the locus of decision, from the inside to the exterior. We would have an exteriorization of consciousness and, in that case, be closer to primary oral cultures where the consciousness was the consciousness of the group. The difference here is that in the primary oral culture they did not have the experience of self-reflexiveness, as print culture shaped us. For those who are heritors of print culture such an experience of exteriorizing consciousness might signify the dispersion of the self, its possible dilution. Contrary to the second oral culture, spontaneity would not be dependent on analytic reflection,[139] but would come from a self driven from the outside.

This might be a good moment to remember what Walter Ong says about the interiorization of technology: "Technology properly interiorized does not degrade human life but on the contrary enhances it."[140] This recollection invites us to look for expressions where this proper interiorization might happen.

Researchers note that for teenagers there is an "internal focus"[141] in their online experiences. Personal sites can be a place for self-reflexiveness. Stern and Lövheim show that this

[137] Cf. Ibid, 166.
[138] Ibid, 176.
[139] Cf. note 51, p.17.
[140] Ong, 2002, 82.
[141] Stern,101.

self-reflexiveness might bring with it a reconfiguration of beliefs, values or a reinforcement of stereotypes and, consequently, a certain reconfiguration of personality. Such self-reflection is also expressed by the importance given to self-documentation.

The reconfiguration of beliefs, values and stereotypes is pointed out by a case study presented by Mia Lövheim.[142] Her research focused on a Swedish web community page created and run by young people and named as "the Site" in her paper. Among other tools the Site had discussion groups where teenagers of different backgrounds and religions discussed their beliefs. Lövheim shows us that the reconfiguration of values online is a real possibility: "discussions at the Site could also lead to critique of convictions and intentions and new dilemmas that a person might not have been exposed to as a solitary practitioner in the offline context." Some Christians recognized that at the Site they "found discussions that offered a flexibility and plurality on crucial issues that was larger than in the local congregation."[143] This study also helps us to conclude that the influence of the Internet in the reconfiguration of values and beliefs can be ambivalent. One of the Christian users of "the Site" says: "on the Site it's often like people have a certain image of the church and they sort of stick to it, and also of the one who is Christian."[144] This example manifests how the insights received by teenagers in their online experiences can give them elements for self-reflection, contributing to reconfigure their values. However it is also clear that the same experience can reinforce previous bias or stereotypes.

Self-reflection also happens when a teenager posts something about him or herself, being obliged to reflect about specific aspects of his or her life, namely about aspects that were unknown before being formulated into a post. Reviewing what they earlier posted, teenagers might also identify changes across time; they might connect different dots and build up the

[142] Lövheim
[143] Idem
[144] Idem

narrative of their lives. As a teenager explains: "[reviewing what was posted] I'll have some semblance of an idea of where I'm going."[145] Susannah Stern explains: "the interest in self-documentation reflects many young authors' desire to witness their own personal growth." [146] All these interactions happen within a context where the feedback from peers is particularly significant and it plays a significant role concerning the reconfigurations of beliefs, values and personalities.

The balance between outsideness – insideness is connected with other dimension of our lives that Ong recognized to be transformed by the interiorization of different technologies: intimacy. Such a dimension is deeply associated with the way privacy is lived within a certain culture. For teenagers using technologies of communication privacy is not so much "about hiding personal information" but more about "carefully managing its disclosure."[147] In a more or less discerned way young people are creating a "*culture of disclosure*."[148] This culture might encourage a balanced transparency among peers where vulnerability is shared rather than being hidden. It might also contribute to the creation of networks of support where respectful feedbacks help to reveal and to face shared concerns, desires and fears.[149] Naturally, this is clearly distinct from the fan mentality described in the previous section.

But the ambiguity of this culture of disclosure needs to be underlined. Such ambiguity is specially linked to the persistence (even when erased) and easy replicability (copy and paste) of the shared information.[150] Teenagers are not always aware of this situation, nor to what audiences their personal information is being disclosed, even if they responsibly restrict access to their

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[145] Teenager quoted by Stern, 103.
[146] Stern, 103.
[147] Carrie James, *Young People, Ethics, and the New Digital Media. A Synthesis from the GoodPlay Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 36.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Cf. Ibid, 38-40.
[150] Cf. danah boyd, "Why Youth ♥ Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in teenage social lives," in *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media,* 126.

personal information. But such ambiguity is not a mere technical problem. The spheres of teenagers' lives being disclosed and the level of disclosure seem to be increasing. For me it is specially striking how they talk and reveal their affective life and even how boy and girlfriends share their intimate dialogues online. Their inner reality appears easily available to be apprehended by others. A certain ideal of progressively and carefully unveiling our innermost mystery without ever exhausting it, may be blurred by the urgency of sharing all our emotions. Is the door to the region to which "we have no direct entry, the personal consciousness of another, the consciousness which utters the mysterious 'I'"[151] being broken into? I do not have a definitive answer to such a question, but I believe that it is a reasonable and fair question. Turkle's statement according to which "intimacy without privacy reinvents what intimacy means"[152] might be a first step on the way to answer that question.

Before concluding this section I would like to briefly reference a couple of topics that it is not possible to minutely analyze. The first is the reference to the polemic character of the space created by the technologies of communication. Among teenagers cyberbullying is an extreme example. Besides these extreme, yet real, situations we might also mention some nasty anonymous or signed feedbacks which deeply hurt people who expose themselves. The polemic character of this culture distinguishes it from what Ong considered to be the irenic feature of second oral culture. The second brief topic I would like to mention is the fact that cell phones are probably the most significantly interiorized technology teenagers are using. The inseparability from such objects, the constant texting, the necessity of being "always on,"[153] makes one

[151] Ong, 1967, 315.
[152] Turkle, 172.
[153] A research involving students from the North of Portugal revealed that **65.9%** of the polled students have the cell always-on, even during the night. Cf. Maria G. Pereira, *O Caso de Amor dos Jovens pelos Meios de Comunicação Digital,* Master Thesis in Education (Braga: Instituto de Educação e Psicologia, Universidade do Minho, May 2009), 272.

experience it as an extension of the self. Without it, teenagers experience that an important dimension of the self is missing.

The interiorization of technology is shaping teenagers by opening them to two different possibilities. First there is a real possibility of a pan-self-ism.[154] It might happen through an exteriorization of consciousness where the self is driven from the outside and is always waiting validation from others in order to make sense of its life. It might also happen through a radicalization of the disclosure culture where the self is everywhere, available to be seen by everyone but hardly to be found inside. This dilution of the self, in a Christian manner would mean the dilution of the human creature. This life style would wound teenagers in their unicity and integrity.

But there is also the possibility of enhancing human life. Properly interiorized these technologies might open the door to a deeper consciousness of human interdependence. The challenge is not to confuse seeds with fruits. Technology will not by itself follow such direction. We must push it in that direction. A seed is to be nurtured.

### 2.2.3 A New Constellation of Sensory Apprehensions

To understand how teenagers are feeling themselves in the cosmos it is important to be aware how they are apprehending reality through the senses. The disclosure culture brings with it a new constellation of sensory apprehensions. To realize how such apprehension might affect their own perception as creatures of God we need to reflect on the senses. As we already saw: "if God's presence is to be known, it must be found while man is living in a newly arranged

[154] After thinking to use this expression I did a search through Google to find who had used it before and to check if it was a valid expression. I found the expression in Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God. Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 134. Wirzba uses it in the context of the theology of creation but in a different sense from the way I am using it here.

constellation of sensory apprehensions."[155] We will consider with more detail touch, sound and sight and briefly the aesthetic taste.

According to Ong, touch is deeply associated with concreteness.[156] Through touch we might be aware of the solidity of extra-subjective existence, of its thickness. To touch is to keep the feet on the ground, not to lose the sense of reality, to be placed in the present. In Christian terms to touch is to be alert to our incarnation in a concrete historical moment. To touch is also to be touched by such reality. Looking to the role touch is playing concerning the process of knowledge, we might find two tensions: the tension presence-absence; and the tension real-virtual.

The touch, the perception of the closeness of another to my body, the possibility of eye contact is particularly important as a condition for human encounters. The effectiveness of this necessity is being affected by the technologies of relationship. As Turkle puts it: "When people have phone conversations in public spaces, their sense of privacy is sustained by the presumption that those around them will treat them not only as anonymous but as if absent."[157] This transformation is not only affecting the public sphere. It affects also intimacy circles such as families. Turkle gives two illustrative examples. During dinner time, we find parents and their children texting their messages and not paying attention to one another.[158] The second example tells us the story of a teenage girl longing for some eye contact or an expectant wait, when her mother picks her up at school or after sports practice and she stays immersed in her cell not paying attention to her daughter.[159] Thus, physical closeness does not necessarily mean to be *in touch*.

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[155] Ong, 1967, 288.
[156] Cf. Ong, 1970, 105.
[157] Turkle, 155.
[158] Cf. Turkle, 157.
[159] Ibid, 189-190.

Naturally, it is arguable to defend that the technologies which allow me to be absent and displaced from where I am, are the same which allow me to be effectively present where I am needed, even if not being physically there. This is definitively true and positive. Nevertheless, the quality of the human presence allowed by technologies of relationship is sometimes blurred by the possibilities of the same technologies. The trivialization of multitasking among teenagers allowing them to do several things at the same time (homework, reading emails, sending IM or texting to several people at the same time) leads adolescents not to give full attention to each one of the persons with whom they are interacting. Being present, yet absent and being absent, yet intermittently present, might interrupt the consciousness of being constantly rooted within a concrete and historic reality.[160] The concentration on the present moment allowed by the second oral culture might be being replaced by dispersion in the present moment.

This des-*touchment* from reality might also be experienced by taking into account the tension between real-virtual. Online games such as Second Life and The Sims Online require the creation of an avatar. Such an avatar is the character played by its creator. For teenagers avatars might be helpful as a good way to express fears, sufferings or desires. Nevertheless, to express it is not to process it. If what these teenagers are going through is too painful or disturbing they need to be mentored in order to give meaning and to integrate what they are expressing. Otherwise, they might be divided, dissociated from themselves. On a different level, a similar kind of dissociation might happen with social networks' profiles. The similitude between avatars and profiles is recognized by teenagers. Turkle quotes an adolescent who calls her profile "my internet twin" and "the avatar of me."[161] When teenagers' performance online unlinks itself from a constructive process of the tentativeness of the self, the dissociation between real and virtual

[160] I must recognize that the technologies of communications (namely Facebook and IM) were not always helpful in adapting myself to the foreign countries where I live, to incarnate in such realities.
[161] Teenager quoted by Turkle, 180.

might be reflected in a certain disembodiment from themselves. John A. Teske's alert might be inspiring:

> "Our sense of ourselves as integral, living, whole persons (…) may become increasingly unavailable as we rely more heavily on electronic mediated communication. In what sense may electronic communication limit the possibility for a friend to make you feel better just by virtue of her physical presence, for an intimate to light up your world with a smile, or for a child to make you laugh just because the sound of his laugh is so contagiously funny?"[162]

There is a certain radicalization in this presentation about how touch might be affected by the interiorization of the technologies of relationship. I did so because I believe that it is important to have a special attention to all that might lead us (especially teenagers) to lose the sense of being incarnated in a concrete reality and historical moment. For human beings living on earth, the concretion of history is the place where they can be found by God.

Concerning the aesthetical taste I make a brief reference in order to underline how this taste is important to give teenagers a sense of belonging to a group. Not always determinant, aesthetical taste (concerning music groups, artists, clothes) helps to distinguish, to "discriminate" the groups to which one wants or does not want to belong. Aesthetical taste among teenagers is, in part, a social construction where social networks and other tools have a significant role. In teenagers' profiles the expression of taste might be linked to their tendency to perform according to what they presume that others expect from them. Anyway, taste is an important sign of teenagers' desire to belong and also of their ability to participate in social processes.

We already did an implicit reflection regarding sound when we exposed the tension between voice and texting. Texting was shown to be, sometimes, a way of hiding, of avoiding an excessive ex-position to others, of avoiding inter-subjective encounters and, consequently, a way of controlling the process of communication. What was said then, leads us to ask if the necessity

[162] John A. Teske "Cyberpsychology, Human Relationships and our Virtual Interiors," in *Zyon*, vol. 37, no.3 (September 2002), 679.

of controlling the whole process of communication does not separate teenagers from the experience of the word as an event they cannot control due to its evanescence. Thus, youth culture seems to undermine sound's ability to provide truly human encounters. Nevertheless, in the same context, sound, specifically the sound of music, allows one of the most significant interior experiences a teenager might have. Listening to melodies and lyrics helps teenagers to look inside and to process some of their experiences.

In the first chapter we described how print radicalized the effects of writing. This was important to the development of analytical processes of thought and to the consideration of reality as an object of knowledge. This was linked to the shift of the word from "sound to visual space."[163] Meanwhile, the word, the image, but also the sound immersed themselves into digital space. The fact that we had described youth culture as the culture of disclosure (*dis*-occultation) might have already suggested that the unification of the different senses occurs, today, around sight. In fact, the information received or produced through the different technologies of relationship (texted messages, YouTube videos, wall posts on Facebook, blog posts) is primarily received as something to be seen. The expression "we talk online" referring to communication using IM, might also be seen as a sign of the abandonment of the second oral culture. But how is this "return" to the sight affecting the perception of the world, the way teenagers perceive and construct reality?

I see two tendencies, partially related to one another but with different consequences: manipulation and creativity. To manipulate means here to dig into others' lives. In fact, by surfing through different personal profiles it is possible to track other people's parties, check out their boy or girlfriends, finally to invade their privacy without their knowing it.[164] Even while doing so,

[163] Ong, 2002, 115.
[164] Cf. Turkle, 252.

teenagers recognize how unbecoming this might be. The word used to describe this activity is significant: stalking.[165] But to manipulate might also mean to see others, and to allow others to see me in "reduced terms."[166] This reduction happens by the use of stereotypes to classify others and guide oneself in the construction of one's own personal profile[167]. A teenager describes it quite well: "You get reduced to a list of favorite things."[168] Such a shallow look into others' reality by surfing from one page to another, clicking different links, might give some reason to Elmar Salmann when he says: "The postmodern man is a passenger, a *voyeur* in an infinite world of semiotic resending."[169] Manipulating instead of contemplating, a *voyeur* is not able to tend to reality.

The facility to cut, paste and re-edit images, videos or texts, the facility to create, access and share new contents, the easy flow of such contents, opens the interactive reality of the Internet to teenagers as a space of creative expression. In fact, inspired by movies such as Harry Potter, or programs such as American Idol, groups of teenager fans interact online and create new videos, stories, and music to participate in and extend the shared experience of these stories/events. Such creative expression is not experienced as an individual task but as resulting from the interactions established online and thus, as a collective process. This creativity is sometimes associated with teenagers' role as consumers and with their online interactions with specific brands. The term "emotional capital"[170] coined by a former president of Coca-Cola, expresses the affective investment made by teenage consumers on brands through such interactions. This consumer

[165] Cf. Turkle, 251-256.
[166] Turkle, 184.
[167] Cf. Turkle, 185.
[168] Teenager quoted by Turkle, 185.
[169] Elmar Salmann *La Palabra Partida. Cristianismo y Cultura Postmoderna* (Madrid: PPC, 1996), 117. My translation.
[170] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 284.

dimension might be excessively exploited.[171] When that happens, we reduce the terms in which teenagers understand their reality (personal and external). Finally, this creativity can also be expressed through participation in relations and initiatives able to create new civic ties.[172]

How are teenagers feeling themselves in the cosmos? As we saw their experience might be ambiguous. Some tendencies of the disclosure culture might lead to a certain *des*-touchment from historical reality and also to a certain experience of disembodiment. These two tendencies contradict the dynamic of incarnation. Another wound found in the analysis of this culture is the tendency to think about the human being in reduced terms. The consciousness revealed by some teenagers of this situation is hopeful. Besides, the consciousness of being before a world so populated with information, images, and relations might lead teenagers to recognize that they are not able to cope with it by themselves. There are too many voices, and often too much disagreement. The creative dimension opened to them by technology might be helpful to express their responsibility as co-creators answering to such a complex world. But they will not be able to do that by themselves, without any orientation. Giving such orientation requires making sense of this reality. We will present two possible paths to do so.[173]

### 2.3 Self: Gergen versus Taylor

In his book *The Saturated Self*, first published in 1991, Kenneth Gergen defends that postmodernity shakes the romantic and modern conception of the self. He asserts that the

[171] The setting of a youth culture is in part an economic process. David White is strongly critical of this process, pointing out its identification with a domestication of adolescence and with its abstraction from different roots within the community: "the subculture of youth, including its music, entertainment, and fashion, has cut young people from identities related to their local communities and sent them soaring in an autonomous youth culture," in David White, "The Social Construction of Adolescence," in Brian Mahan et al., *Awakening Youth Discipleship* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 13.
[172] Cf. James, 70-72.
[173] In the beginning we presented two theories concerning teenagers' identity as a way of better understanding of adolescence. The goal now is to have a better understanding of the described reality as a cultural one.

changes of these views were provoked by the technologies of self saturation[174] which "led to an enormous proliferation of relationships."[175] In fact, today - even more than when Gergen first published his book[176]- a significant number of technologies allow us to diversify and multiply our relations. The diagnosis seems disturbing: "Social saturation furnishes us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self."[177] According to Gergen the calls we receive from our numerous relationships are "inviting us to play such a variety of roles that the very concept of an 'authentic self' with knowable characteristics recedes from view."[178] The result is a "multiphrenia" which consists in "the splitting of the individual into a multiplicity of self investments."[179]

Multiphrenia can be considered as a transitory stage which anticipates a significant paradigm shift from the concept of "authentic self" to the concept of relationship as the key to understand who human beings are. A transition between the understanding of ourselves as "I" to the understanding of ourselves as "us." The transitional moment is characterized by the multiplication of choices available for the self. In the context of its multiple relations "as others are incorporated into the self, and their desires become one's own, there is an expansion of goals – of 'musts' wants, and needs. (…) Each new desire places its demands and reduces one's liberties. (…) Liberation becomes a swirling vertigo of demands."[180] Deeply self-centered the "I" tries to make sense of all the inputs received from its relations. Following the logic of cost-opportunity, a lot of criteria of self-evaluation are incorporated into the self, leading to an

[174] Gergen gives different examples of these technologies: railroad, radio broadcasting, electronic mail.
[175] Gergen, 49.
[176] I am using 2000 edition but there are no changes in the book from one edition to another. In the introduction to the edition I am using, Gergen explains how the situation he described was radicalized in the subsequent years.
[177] Ibid, 6.
[178] Ibid, 7.
[179] Ibid, 73-74.
[180] Ibid, 74-75.

experience of inadequacy.[181] Thus, for Gergen the "idea of 'rational choice' becomes meaningless."[182]

Following this description Gergen dismisses the idea of an "individual essence to which one remains true or committed." Consequently, identity "is continuously emergent, re-formed and redirected as one moves through the sea of ever-changing relationships."[183] Gergen seems to accept that the locus of decision-making is located outside the personal consciousness. More than constitute a change in our consciousness, the interiorization of the technologies of self saturation would lead to its dispersion. What I previously said about pan-self-ism might be used to criticize Gergen's understanding of identity.[184]

Gergen inverts the relation between human beings and technology. If with Ong we studied how technology was interiorized within our consciousness, according to Gergen what is happening is the fusion between humans and machines: "in this postmodern condition it is the very distinction between person and machines that has become increasingly subverted. With this shift, the humanist tradition is further jeopardized."[185] Using Jean Baudrillard's words Gergen says: "we no longer exist as playwrights or actors but as terminals of multiple networks."[186] Let us allow Gergen to sum up his own thesis:

> "With postmodern consciousness begins the erasure of the category of self. No longer can one securely determinate what it is to be a specific kind of person… (…) … the concept of individual self ceases to be intelligible. At this point one is prepared for the new reality of relationship. Relationships make possible the concept of the self. Previous possessions of the individual self - autobiography, emotions and morality - become possessions of relationships."[187]

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[181] Cf. Ibid, 76-77.
[182] Ibid, 79.
[183] Ibid, 139.
[184] I also believe that Gergen's understanding of a relational identity is not as consistent as Surrey's theory. Surrey does not seem to suppose any dilution of the self.
[185] Gergen, "Introduction to the 2000 edition," xix.
[186] Jean Baudrillard quoted by Gergen, 157.
[187] Gergen, 170.

Gergen is provocative and insightful describing the movement which occurred since modernity concerning the different conceptions of identity, underlining the changes in such conceptions. At the same time he is not able to recognize what does not change. Refusing all "essence," the idea of a "human intrinsic dignity," he fails to realize what kind of experiences transcend human contingency.

Assuming the importance of the relational dimension for identity is a suggestive point and might contribute to going beyond a certain narcissism. Nevertheless, if each person is just a terminal in a network of different relations, if there is no intrinsic value in any one of these terminals, consequently, each one of these terminals is easily replaceable. Our lives become discontinuous narratives with no direction.

Charles Taylor's book *The Ethics of Authenticity* was published in the same year as Gergen's book. In his book Taylor does a reflection about the self and its construction. His perspective is totally different from Gergen's. According to Taylor the search for authenticity has not vanished from our culture. Associated with "self-fulfillment" it corresponds to the value of "being true to oneself."[188] Authenticity seems to be the value which leads the search for and construction of the self. Taylor finds the sources of authenticity within the Romantic period and our thinking of ourselves as "beings with inner depths."[189] Besides this idea another notion - that Taylor associates with Rousseau - is in play here, the notion of "self-determining freedom."[190] Both these concepts imply that each person has her/his own way of being human.[191] Naturally, by doing this analysis Charles Taylor does not consider a definitive rupture with Modernity and, thus, he does not seem totally convinced about the emergence of a post-modern paradigm.

[188] Taylor, 15.
[189] Ibid, 26.
[190] Ibid, 27.
[191] Cf. Ibid, 28-29.

Anyhow, recognizing the crisis of reason, Taylor is critical about the fact that personal choices are not subject to public dialogue and argumentation. The criterion to choose is the choice itself, the freedom to choose what is good for me without having anyone who might dispute the validity of such a choice. According to Taylor this process leads to a situation where lives "have been flattened and narrowed" due to "an abnormal and regrettable self-absorption."[192] Taylor's concern seems to resonate with Turkle's apprehensions concerning weak ties.[193] This is clear when she says:

> "Real people have consistency, so if things are going well in our relationships, change is gradual, worked through slowly. In online life the pace of relationships speeds up. One quickly moves from infatuation to disillusionment and back."[194]

Similar to Gergen, Taylor wants to challenge the possibility of a "social *atomism*."[195] But, differently from him Taylor considers authenticity as a "valid ideal."[196] Charles Taylor does not accept to dismiss the individual self. In order to challenge the social atomism fostered by self-absorption, Taylor argues that, despite all originality and confrontation with social rules, identity construction cannot be separated from "openness to horizons of significance."[197] Such horizons give meaning and criteria to the development of the personal self. Still, relationships must not be subdued in order to guarantee the self's fulfillment. Relationships are indispensable to define ourselves: "If some of the things I value most are just accessible to me only in relation to the person I love, then she becomes internal to my identity."[198] These relations imply a dialogical

[192] Ibid, 4.
[193] Cf. Turkle, 239.
[194] Ibid, 288.
[195] Taylor, 58.
[196] Ibid, 23.
[197] Ibid, 66.
[198] Ibid, 34.

understanding of the human being and a qualitatively different understanding of the consistency of human relations when comparing it with Gergen, guaranteed by the "*inescapable horizons*."[199]

The most significant difference between Gergen and Taylor concerning the self resides in the absence and the existence of horizons. According Gergen being possessed by relations the self is constantly being redirected. According to Taylor the self needs to be situated before an inescapable horizon which assures the meaning of its life. Gergen apparently believes in a plastic self with no direction. Taylor looks for an orientated self. Implicitly, Gergen dismisses the idea of an interior life and of a personal consciousness. The orientated self is more suitable to understand what is happening with teenagers and to be linked with the Christian tradition.

### 2.4 The Question that Remain

The situation we just described is undoubtedly complex. The way teenagers are interiorizing the technologies of relationship affects their interior lives and how they experience themselves in the cosmos. They are exposed to a world of transience and risk, a world of urgencies where reality is increasingly fluid. They experience such exposure in a moment of their lives where they are going through a lot of inner and exterior changes. Robert Kegan[200] alerts us that teenagers are not prepared to answer all that society is demanding from them. It is not surprising that anxiety and tension might appear. Finishing this chapter I will identify the three main questions implicitly present in teenagers' lives.

*Who am I?* Our reflection showed how this question is important for teenagers. An excessive performance of the "I" that goes beyond a healthy tentativeness of the self might alienate the self from the consciousness of its inner vulnerability and make it believe that it is its

[199] Cf, Ibid, 31-41.
[200] Cf. Robert Kegan, *In Over our Heads* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 17-18.

own creator. Nevertheless, the testimonies of teenagers collected by Turkle and other authors reveal that some of them are conscious of such ambivalence. This consciousness might lead them to accept their finitude, to accept themselves as creatures.

*Am I loved?* The need for recognition involves a certain anxiety due to the difference between what teenagers feel they are before themselves and how they imagine others see them. In this relational context it is important to grow in an interdependence which allows autonomy. The tension felt here is between a tethered self,[201] unable to dive into his or her internal depth and a self able to be alone and to recognize his or her constitutive dependence on others.

*Where am I going?* Networked within "an infinite world of semiotic resending," [202] teenagers might be led to experience a certain dilution, lost in a plural world of contradictory voices and appeals. But there are also glimpses in their lives where they find the call to give structure, meaning and direction to the narratives of their lives. The process of self-documentation allowed by blogs or Facebook is a possible example.

Revealing the human being as a creature of God in his or her origin, essence and ultimate goal, the Christian tradition might help teenagers to answer these questions, to heal their wounds and to open for them the doors of true fullness. It might be a meaningful inescapable horizon.

[201] Cf. Turkle, 171-186.
[202] Salmann, 117. My translation.

## 3. Christian concept of creature: a theological basis to address a cultural challenge

> *"We are created, we are creatures; this basic statement of faith sums up the truth that we are not self-sufficient, that we cannot find fulfillment without turning towards the unknown God who holds us in existence and calls us to himself." (Olivier Clément)*

In the previous chapters I looked upon our present increasingly technologized human condition, narrowing my regard to a very concrete context: teenagers using technologies of relationship and its relation with their interior life. Technology can be considered as an extension of our limits, namely concerning our ability to relate with each other. Such extension might also hide our limits from us, preventing us from recognizing our creatureliness.

This chapter gives special attention to the concept of the human being as a creature, as intrinsically referred to God, "in his/her most remote origin, in his/her innermost essence and in his/her ultimate goal."[203] We are establishing here what, in reference to Ong's work, Farrel called the "divine ground of being."[204] This theological basis will allow me to give an appropriate theological and pastoral answer to the questions raised by the previous chapters concerning what might be happening with teenagers' interior lives.

### 3.1. *In His/Her Most Remote Origin*: God Recognized as Creator

Faith in God as creator constantly develops itself across the different Biblical traditions. Such faith allows the people to recognize the constant and faithful intervention of God in their favor throughout history. "The 'answer' of the Scriptures to questions about the ultimate meaning of human life is a long story which begins with the experience of Semitic slaves who are led out

[203] Pedro Castelao, "La condición humana en perspectiva teológica. El hombre creado a 'imagen y semejanza' de Dios," Public Lecture (Jaén: Seminario Diocesano, February 16th, 2006), printed text given by the author in Theological Anthropology course (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia de Comillas, 2007).
[204] Cf. note 6, page 5.

of slavery in Egypt into freedom as a people with land and future."[205] Thus, within the biblical narratives, the consciousness of being a creature is a vital experience connected with the constitutive experience of Israel's origins as the People of God. This allows us to underline the fact that the recognition of God as creator is not an abstraction or a speculative thought. It is deeply connected with the people's aspirations. As Sachs reminds us, "Genesis 1-11 provides a kind of prologue to the story of Israel's liberation and election by God."[206] Considering that the last version of Genesis was probably redacted in the exilic period, we can conclude that the aspiration for liberation and for God's intervention was crucial.

In the context of the exile and the post-exilic periods, faith in God´s work of creation is developed and expressed explicitly. For instance, exilic and post-exilic biblical hymns have their own theology of creation. Celebrating Yahweh's deeds, these hymns praise him for the events that brought Israel into existence.[207] In these deeds it is possible to include cosmogonic and historical events. In fact, when we look at the hymns as a whole, it is difficult to make a sharp distinction between creation and God's deeds within history. Both realities constitute Israel's foundation. In fact, for the hymns, "the divine act that is celebrated liturgically is the moment of Israel's origin. It can be described either as the exodus–land taking or as a cosmogony."[208] From what has been said, it is not surprising to verify that, especially in the exilic period, expressions such as *Yahweh has chosen us*, *Yahweh will save us* are very similar to *Yahweh created us*. "Creation is already the mystery of salvation."[209] In these central experiences life can be

[205] John R. Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 7.
[206] Ibid.,12.
[207] Richard J. Clifford, "Creation in the Psalms," in R.J. Clifford and J.J. Collins (ed.), *Creation in the Biblical Traditions* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992), 65.
[208] Ibid, 69.
[209] Luis F. Ladaria, *Introdución a la Antropología Teológica* (Navarra: Verbo Divino, 1995), 44. My translation.

recognized as a gift and the human being is invited to accept his/her own life as an experience of grateful awe for "God's gracious and free act."[210]

Moving from the lived situation of the people of God to the recognition of God as Creator does not mean to undermine the incommensurable role of God or to invert His primacy. In the Priestly account (Gn 1:1--2:3) such priority is given by the climatic use of the seventh place. "God's Sabbath is therefore the climax of the story, which is primarily about God, not humans."[211] Within Yahwist tradition (Gn 2:4b--3:24) "we find the word *bara'* used to denote this unique, divine activity."[212] It is important to note that God's primacy and essential distinctiveness cannot be confused with an insurmountable gap between the creator and his creation, namely the human being. The focus of the creation stories is "on the divine power which forms, orders and sustains life. (…) God is not merely the one who started it all going [creation *ex nihilo*] but the one who at every moment holds it in existence. The most basic dimension of reality is this relationship."[213] Such relationship is revealed as God's primary initiative in decisive moments. It is significant that the word *bara'* besides its appearance in Genesis also appears in the context of the Exodus associated with the experience of liberation and in the context of the Covenant expressing God's faithfulness. This continuous care of God for his creation is present in the context of the use of the technologies of relationship.

Trying to illustrate concrete human existence as a departure point for recognizing God as creator; the human being's utter dependence upon God; and the primacy of God within creation, I will present a brief analysis of Psalm 111.

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[210] Sachs, 14.
[211] Richard J. Clifford, "Genesis" in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 10.
[212] Sachs, 13.
[213] Ibid, 13-14.

3.1.1. Psalm 111

Psalm 111 celebrates, essentially, the facts about the exodus and the taking of the land. It presupposes a deep correlation between creation and history. In fact, faith in creation sustains faith in the continuity of the covenant and faith in the everlasting fidelity of God shown through his works in favor of the people. Consequently, the different experiences of liberation experienced by the people in their life (e.g. providing food v.5a; giving the heritage v.6b) are integrated in the history of salvation as a whole, a history where redemption (v.9a) is likely to take place. Thus, the theology of creation reflected in Psalm 111 points to God as Israel's creator, as the only source of Israel's being. As creator, God reveals himself not only in a 'distant past' but across history. To create is also to sustain. Consequently, the act of creation might be seen as a dynamic action: "through praise, the worshiping community inaugurates the venture to find the eternal God who is creating and recreating the world."[214]

In sum, the faith in creation expressed through this psalm is to be understood in the context of a constant relationship between God and Israel. Yahweh is the one who guarantees the continuity of this relation through his fidelity. Nevertheless, as J. David Pleins argues, "the Hymns of Praise do open us to the God who lives in an enduring relationship with humanity and creation."[215]

God's deeds institute the people. The recognition of such deeds leads to a consciousness of being dependent on God for their existence as a people and as individuals. Finding their origin in God, they recognize themselves as creatures. Hans-Joachim Kraus[216] translates verse 4a of psalm 111 as: *A memorial of his wonders he has instituted*. This author uses such a verse as the title for his commentary to this psalm which invites us to see it as a deep expression of a grateful

[214] J. David Pleins, *The Psalms. Songs of Tragedy, Hope and justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 89.
[215] Ibid, 87.
[216] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: a commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 357.

memory. The openness to God expressed through a grateful memory is strictly connected with the personal and communal identities.

### 3.1.2 Systematic synthesis

The biblical data we have seen so far, allows us to underline some important aspects. Creation is a free act of love which results from God's initiative. Creation is limited. Human beings do not have in themselves the key to understand creation and their own existence. God's initiative can be understood in terms of a relationship which gives consistence to creation and establishes the foundations to the human being's free answer to God. Without undermining God's primacy, creation can be understood more as an experience of communication and communion, than as an experience of separation or distinction. This must be related with the notion of the self-in-relation described in the beginning of the second chapter. Using such notion in a Christian context we must root it in God's relationship with God's creation. The revelation of an intimate communication of life from God to the human being is given by Gn 2:7 where we see God breathing into human being's nostrils the breath of life (*nefesh).* It is this breath which sustains human life and existence. Life is continuously received from God. "By the very life in us we are rooted in the one living God. (…) Each heartbeat is an act of faith. Living cannot but be celebration."[217] Human being does not exist juxtaposed to God; consequently we must avoid "objectifying language as if the Creator and his creature existed side by side."[218]

Psalm 111 does not talk solely about God's primacy. It also describes human openness toward God. It describes how the human being stands before God, with what attitude. The fear of the Lord described in such a text is connected with an experience of recognition and with an

[217] Olivier Clément, *On the Human Being. A spiritual anthropology* (New York, London, Manila: New City Press, 2000), 25-26.
[218] Ibid, 25.

experience of awe. Recognizing this deep dependence on God the human being is invited to live with gratitude before his/her Creator.

> "This 'stand before God' features theologically every human being, regardless of how he/she stands before God. God's offer to the human being constitutes him/her so decisively that, if by chance God withdraws God's offer to one concrete person, such person will cease to be, theologically speaking, a human being, even if he/she will maintain his/her human biological existence."[219]

How can we guarantee human dignity when establishing such a strong dependence toward God? This is a fair question which will be addressed by turning our attention to the human being as Image of God.

### 3.2 *In his/her innermost essence:* Human being as God's image

*Gaudium et Spes* starts its chapter about the dignity of the human person by rooting theological anthropology in the biblical concept of human being as image of God (*GS* 12). There is no doubt how this concept is significantly important within the Christian tradition and how it would be impossible to build up any reflection about the human being in a Christian perspective without mention of such a concept.

In its biblical origin (Gn 1:26-28; 5:1-3; 9:6) "Image" (*selem*) establishes an important bond between God and the human being. Surely, it allows me to conclude about the significant place humankind reaches within the created order. This significant place is underlined by the fact that only human beings (man and woman) are said to be created in God's image This status of human being as the climax[220] of God's creative activity is underlined by the expression "very good" used to describe man and woman as distinguished from the rest of creation described only as good. Such stature gives human beings the possibility of representing God.

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[219] Alfonso Novo, "La (in-)definición del hombre: retos para la teología," in *Compostellanum – Secciones de Estudios Jacobeos y Ciencias Eclesiásticas,*" Volumen L, Números 1-4 (2005), 256. My translation.
[220] Eduard M. Curtis, "Image of God," in David Noel Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary,* vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 390.

Based on this biblical departure point I would like to underline two theological consequences of considering the human being as *image of God.*

### 3.2.1 Human being as *relational*

Let us start by connecting humankind's ability to represent God with Karl Barth's interpretation of the image of God. Barth interprets it in terms of relationship. As Bromiley explains,[221] Barth establishes a strict relation between *in the image of God he created them* [humankind] and *male and female he created them*. For Barth this reveals that "within God there is a relationship in unity (…) which finds reflection in the indestructible relationship in unity of man as essentially man and woman. In other words, intra-personal relationship is the essential mark of man as it is also of God."[222] It would be possible to raise some hermeneutical objections to this thesis. Bromiley does so. Nevertheless, Barth offered a way of conceiving the relation between God and human beings which has been present in Christian theology since the middle of the 20th century. It is exactly because we considered the relational dimension as something inseparable from God that, considering human being as God's image we can find contemporary authors saying: "From the first moment of life we are social beings who can only be human in communion with others. To be human means to be in-relation, to be with. (…) What and who *my* real 'self' is, is a mystery which is constituted by the mystery of others."[223] This statement seems to resemble Karl Rahner's thought which explains that the understanding of myself can happen only through the mediation of the other: "the known personal Thou is the mediation, the 'being-

[221] G.W. Bromiley, "Image of God," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley (ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 804.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Sachs, 19.

within-oneself' of the subject."[224] Consequently, according to Rahner, even out of an explicit recognition of God's existence it is possible to realize that: "The act of personal love for another human being is therefore the all-embracing basic act of man which gives meaning, direction and measure to everything else."[225]

Otherwise, the consequence of all that has been said for the Christian life is very well shown by the Pauline theology of the body. In Paul's theology the difference of each member is deeply connected with its inseparability from the body as a whole, with what each member is, and needs to be orientated toward the benefit of the common good of the community. Olivier Clément nicely illustrates this Pauline theology:

> "The Church as the Body of Christ requires an attitude of respect, loyalty and obedience, that obedience to death which we see in Christ; but the Church as the extension of Pentecost calls for courage, imagination, the creative transformation of **eros**, all the conflict experienced by the conscious personality exercising its freedom. But the sole purpose of this conflict is to bring about a communion (…)"[226]

Sacramentally, the Eucharist deeply expresses and realizes the common union (communion) of all members with the Lord described by Paul. To be honestly celebrated and lived, it implies that each one desires "to share one's own self in love."[227]

From a Christian perspective the experience of communion is rooted in Trinity. In fact, each person of the Trinity is precisely defined from his relations, from his communicability, from personal love for one another: "The mystery of the singular and the plural in humanity mirrors the mystery of the singular and plural in God. Just as the essential unity of God is realized in personal love, so we are called to resemble God in realizing our essential unity with all humanity."[228]

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[224] Karl Rahner, "Unity of the Love of Neighbor and the Love of God," in *Theological Investigations VI* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 241.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Clément, 49.
[227] Sachs, 38.
[228] Clément, 43.

Before concluding this reflection about our relational dimension, I would like to underline how we are invited to live our relation with the remainder of creation, remembering God´s command to till and keep the land (Gen 2:15) which might be connected with Christ's redemption of the human being: "in Christ, humanity recovers its creative responsibility, the dignity of a co-worker with God."[229] In a Christian vision technology is founded on this aspect of biblical revelation and should be used as an expression of taking care of creation and one another.

In this taking care of creation is expressed an important feature of each human being: creativity. We are called to participate in God's creation as creative beings. This creativity can be expressed in our human relationships. Such creativity it is a gift and a responsibility.

Among human beings our relational dimension is, sometimes, shaken by our tendency to manipulate or possess (as happens with teenagers in online stalking). Therefore, we need to be aware of our inapprehensibility as human beings in order to be able to recognize others' sacredness and our own dignity.

### 3.2.2 The elusiveness of the human being

Analyzing teenagers' reality we saw how the use of technologies might lead them to see one another in reduced terms. Christian tradition offers us a wonderful "antidote" to this attitude. Creating human beings in his "image," communicating to each person his breath, God communicates to each one his grace, his mysterious character. Theologically, mystery is not currently understood as what is hidden and can be revealed in the future. Mystery is understood as the reality which "absolutely and infinitely exceeds – because it basically contains them – human beings' cognitive, volitional and emotional abilities."[230] We must preserve this non-objective

[229] Clément, 119.
[230] Castelao. My translation.

feature of mystery each time we encounter someone, but also when we try to understand ourselves. The other and I are not objects of knowledge. As John says to us "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed" (1 Jn 3:2).

To explain the impossibility of considering a human being as an object of knowledge, to sustain his/her indefinability, Olivier Clément mentions Vladimir Losskys' thesis: "the person is the irreducibility of the individual to his human nature."[231] Behind such a statement is the idea that no human being can be reduced to any one of his/her dimensions. Our unity is not the sum of our body, soul and spirit. Our unity is an expression of our divine origin. It is within the threshold of such origin that we can understand one of Clément's most beautiful affirmations: "The person is not an object open to inspection, any more than God is. Like God it is incomparable, inextinguishable, fathomless."[232]

This decisive reality is very well expressed each time we refuse to be labeled. In my ministry experience with teenagers I realize how significant it is for them to learn how to overcome the tendency of using labels with one another, namely in the way the read and interpret peers' profiles on social networks. They truly experience suffering when they realize someone is labeling them and, being conscious of such reality, they start to be able to recognize the suffering they may cause when they label someone else.

We need to bring out the necessity of an apophatic anthropology[233] parallel to an apophatic theology. Such an anthropology constitutes an exercise of humility through which we accept the impossibility of knowing everything about anyone. Such an anthropology is a call to consider the other as a holy land and, like Moses, to remove the sandals and contemplate a bush on fire that is not consumed (Ex 3:2-5). We are called to consider each Thou always as an icon

[231] Losskys quoted by Clément, 30.
[232] Clément, 30-31.
[233] Cf. Clément, 30.

and never as an idol or an object. As for what concerns its relation with the divine "the idol tries to abolish that distance [the distance which avoids manipulation] through the availability of the god who is placed permanently within the fixity of a face."[234] Analogically through any cult of personality we tend to tame our idol, reducing him or her to our aspirations, ideals or needs. In contrast, "the icon conceals and reveals that upon which it resists the separation in it between the divine and its face. Visibility of the invisible, a visibility where the invisible gives itself to be seen as such."[235] Naturally, an affirmation as such applies specifically to the incarnated Christ, "visible icon of the Father."[236] Nevertheless, accepting what in each person is invisible and untouchable we are invited to look at anyone with the same "reverence" with which we look at an icon.

3.3 *In his/her ultimate goal*: attracted by the infinite

"Thou madest us for Thyself and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee" (St. Augustine, *The Confessions,* Book 1, Ch. 1). The experience of a restless heart looking for fulfillment is present everywhere. When teenagers are looking for new emotions, in their interactions, such a tendency is being expressed, even if in a shadow way.

From the Scriptures we know that "just as the world has its absolute origin from God and "from nothing" else, so too, it is finally dependent upon God for its fulfillment and final meaning. This is the basic significance of God's Lordship in Scripture."[237] In Jesus' ministry such Lordship is deeply connected with the preaching and the invitation to enter into the kingdom of heaven. One of the most common images used by Jesus in different contexts reveals to us this experience of fulfillment to which all are invited. In fact, the image of the banquet easily evokes the idea of

[234] Jean-Luc Marion, "The Marches of Metaphysics," *The Idol and the Distance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 9.
[235] Marion, 8.
[236] Castelao. My translation.
[237] Sachs, 99.

abundance and of fulfilling the hunger of those in need. This same abundance is also present in some of Jesus' miracles. It is enough to recall Jesus providing food for the multitude in a desert place (Lk 9:12-17) to find a good example of the abundance offered by him. Jesus shows to his disciples that "abundance is found not in the power to purchase with money, but in the power of the Lord."[238] Such authority "is symbolized by table service,"[239] which means that the abundance promised by Jesus is deeply connected to him giving up his life. Jesus also appears as fulfilling his apostles' desires when after his questioning Peter answers him: "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (Jn 6: 68-69). In all these examples it is impossible to ignore an eschatological dimension of these texts. Such a dimension is also present when we consider the ultimate goal of the human being.

In Christian contexts different theological traditions, different spiritual traditions underline our natural orientation toward God. I will highlight these features of the human being using Karl Rahner's concept of active self-transcendence and by doing a brief reflection about the principle and foundation proposed by St. Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*.

### 3.3.1 The principle of *active self-transcendence*

According to Rahner this principle includes all the structure of being. According to such a principle, "becoming must be understood as becoming *more,* as the coming to be more reality, as reaching and achieving a greater fullness of being."[240] This shows us a very positive understanding of how reality develops itself, an optimistic view of evolution. There are some important objections we could make to such a vision. Nevertheless, I consider that such a

[238] Luke T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Daniel Harrington (ed), (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 149.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 184.

principle is appropriate to describe the human being's aspiration to overcome him or herself. In fact, "the desire to know, to have, to overcome him or herself and to achieve the highest goals is not something that the human being has but may not have, but, quite the contrary, it seems that it constitutes what the human being is in his or her innermost being."[241]

To understand this human inner dynamic it is important also to clarify another concept of Rahner's thought: the human transcendental experience. To comprehend it we need to mention the different meanings[242] of the word *transcendental*: a) it gives human beings the necessary structures to know; b) the movement of accommodating an object of knowledge or a desire into one's structure of knowledge c) the experience of transcendence: the fact that the human being is *capax dei (*Augustine).

Naturally, of all the meanings described for the word *transcendental* the one which is more related to the present topic is the last one. Nevertheless, all of them reveal human beings in their openness, all of them presuppose a horizon toward which we all tend as human beings:

> "The transcendental orientation of man to the incomprehensible and ineffable Mystery which constitutes the enabling condition for knowledge and freedom, and therefore for subjective life as such, in itself implies a real, albeit a non-thematic experience of God."[243]

It is very important to note that for Rahner "we do not experience our transcendentality without also experiencing our historicity. The question of how these two features—transcendentality and historicity—correlate to each other is undoubtedly paramount in Rahner's theology."[244] This is pretty clear, for when talking about the experience of man and God, Rahner refers himself to the term *experience* meaning "that concrete developing history of experience in every individual man

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[241] Castelao. My translation.
[242] Cf. Ibid.
[243] Karl Rahner, "Experience of Self and Experience of God," in *Theological Investigations,* 13 (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 123.
[244] Derek Michaud , "Karl Rahner," in Wesley Wildman (Ed.) *Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Western Theology* (©1994, last material incorporated 2005) http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/bce/rahner.htm Accessed June, 29, 2012.

in his uniqueness and difference from all others, and in the whole length and breadth of an individual human life."[245]

In this concrete life our non-thematic orientation to God implies that we are free and responsible for our lives. It is within this frame that we are called to choose what we want to be as persons. Such freedom should not be considered as something we can possess or not, something different from what we are. As human beings we are constitutively free. Naturally, this freedom can be actualized or not in the concrete circumstances of our lives either due to external constraints (e.g. dictatorship; peer pressure among teenagers), or due to the personal choice of refusing to live responsibly. In Rahner's terms we would say that the transcendental experience of my freedom "is always mediated by the concrete reality of time and space."[246] The importance of seeing human beings as constitutively free is that, when so treated, they do not depend on any subjective human judgment to attribute or recognize freedom. Freedom "it is not a neutral power which one has and possesses as something different from himself."[247]

Freedom is what we are as a gift received from God. "This means something quite astounding, something which we don't often take seriously. We are really free to be, free to be ourselves, different from God. The real freedom of the world is what one most intensely desires and is its greatest good."[248] Or, as Moltmann said, "to create is not only to do, but also to let be."[249] We are free to recognize God as our Creator, we are free to accept the consequences of representing God, we are free to love God and our neighbor, we are free to live according to our orientation toward the infinite mystery which constitutes us. Such is the greatness and the abyss of our responsibility. Actualizing our being, considering ourselves as a whole, we are called to

[245] Rahner, 1975 124.
[246] Rahner, 1978, 36.
[247] Ibid, 38.
[248] Sachs, 27.
[249] J. Moltmann quoted by Ladaria, 53. My translation.

design the *fundamental option* of our lives, to give meaning, direction and purpose at each step of our journey. We are called to "'become somebody' not to be somebody different every day."[250] Freedom is the capacity of a subject "to achieve his final and irrevocable self. (…) Freedom is the event of something eternal."[251]

### 3.3.2 Principle and Foundation[252]

The *Principle and Foundation* is clearly an anthropological text where Ignatius presents to us the way he conceives the human being's relation with God and the world. At this moment I will just underline what is meant by the relationship between a human being and God.

The first statement about the human being is that he or she is created. Thus, Ignatius affirms from the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises* the experience of creatureliness as an experience of dependence. Such dependence needs to be understood as openness toward God: "The openness of a human being toward God's transcendence constitutes the core of his or her being,"[253] a human being is considered as a "vector"[254] directed to God. The 'to' has an important role to help us realize how important it is to deepen our reference to God, how important it is to accept our finality. To take on such orientation supposes the discernment of the different inner

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[250] Ibid, 31.
[251] Rahner, 1978, 96.
[252] SE [23] I present the text:
Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.
And the other things on the face of the earth are created for man and that they may help him in prosecuting the end for which he is created.
From this it follows that human being is to use them as much as they help him on to his end, and ought to rid himself of them so far as they hinder him as to it.
For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things in all that is allowed to the choice of our free will and is not prohibited to it; so that, on our part, we want not health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, long rather than short life, and so in all the rest; desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created. Translation by David L. Fleming, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. A literal translation and a contemporary reading* (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 22.
[253] Santiago Arzubialde, *Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio. História y Análisis*, (Bilbao, Santander: Ediciones Mensajero, Sal Teraae, 2009), 113. My translation.
[254] Francisco J. Ruiz Pérez, *Teologia del Camino. Una aproximación antropológico-teológica a Ignacio de Loyola,* (Bilbao, Santander: Ediciones Mensajero, Sal Teraae, 2000), 46. My translation.

movements, the different motions and desires. The mere existence of such inner motions and desires is already telling us that there is something in ourselves moving us to go forward.

Only by assuming him or herself as a creature can the human being find and understand him/herself. "Human being, in his/her pure creatureliness dependent on God, is called constitutively by vocation toward a grateful adoration, which happens within the human being's historical and temporal existence because in praise he/she achieves his/her full human condition."[255]

As I said in the beginning, the *Principle and Foundation* establishes the relation between the human being, God and the world. On this point, I am especially interested in highlighting the relation with God. Nevertheless it is important to note that, in a full comprehension of this text, these two dimensions are inseparable. To praise the Lord cannot be understood as a kind of "solipsist" attitude which distracts me from the rest of creation: "To praise cannot be alienated from serving God, which properly is collaboration with God's work. Searching for God forwards human being towards creation… which is concretized by serving brotherhood… which is rooted in a historical existence."[256] Understood in this perspective to praise is identified with the way toward human being's fullness, the way toward human being's salvation.

These two examples (Principle of *Active self-transcendence; Principle and Foundation*) reveal to us the human being as "nostalgic for infinity," as "nostalgic for fullness." We need to learn how to be human like this. As mediator of creation between God and humanity, Jesus Christ can teach us the way.

[255] Arzubialde, 115. My translation.
[256] Cl. Viard quoted by Arzubialde, 115, note 12. My translation.

3.4 Christ: the perfect human being

As we saw previously, there is a deep connection between creation and salvation. For Israel the experience of liberation was significant in order to progressively understand God as creator. From a Christian perspective, this liberation achieves its climax in Christ. As savior he is the true liberator. Through this mission Christ is also leading creation toward its end. He is bringing out plenitude. In fact, only "in him all things hold together," (Col 1:17).

But Jesus does not only assume recapitulation as his mission, he is also considered creation's mediator, the one "by Whom all things were made."[257] Consequently, all I previously said in this chapter about the human being cannot be separated from Christ. In his life, death and resurrection Jesus reveals who God is, but also who is the human being and what his or her finality is. This is clearly sustained in *Gaudium et Spes*:

> "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself (…) He Who is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), is Himself the perfect man."(*GS* 22)

We can take a brief look at the narrative approaches of Jesus' life in order to see how he stood before creation and how he concretely expressed through his life his role as the recapitulation of creation. In the nature parables we can see Jesus' attention to the rhythm of nature. We also can see his sensitivity recognizing God's solicitude for his creation (Mt 6:28)[258] and, thus, inviting their interlocutors to trust in God. Recognizing creation as gift to all – "for he [the Father] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Mt 5:45) – Jesus appeals to his disciples to love all human creatures, including their enemies (Mt 5:44). Bringing in himself the kingdom of God, Jesus re-establishes creation

[257] Nicene Creed.
[258] "And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin."

(especially human creation) bringing order by his coming close to those in need, curing them, and in his ability to command nature (Mt 8:26).[259] It is important to note that curing on the sabbath can be seen as an important meaning as sign of the re-establishing of the order of creation. The sabbath is the day to praise the Lord for his deeds and Jesus, assuming his Lordship and his care for the marginalized, uses the sabbath to bring human beings from the margins into the community, into communion, to re-establish their proper place within creation.

### 3.4.1 Sharing the divine affiliation

It is worthwhile to note that this topic is treated by Luis Ladaria in his chapter "Human being in Christ's Grace." In such a context is possible to understand our divine affiliation as part of God communication of Godself to the human being. Ladaria considers divine affiliation as an expression of one of the most important anthropological presuppositions: "The human being has been called toward configuration with Jesus Christ and only in such configuration is accomplished God's plan about the human being."[260] In fact, his divine affiliation is essential to understand Jesus' identity, "his unique and unrepeatable relationship with the Father."[261] Each human being, following Christ - the only one who can lead us into this relationship - is invited to share this same unique and unrepeatable relationship.

What features can we find in this relationship? Following Andrés Torres Queiruga there is an important difference in his preaching the kingdom compared with his immediate predecessor. Despite all his closeness with John the Baptist, Jesus breaks with John's eschatological threats and he preaches "the kingdom as salvation. And salvation for all: for the

[259] "Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm."
[260] Ladaria, 146. My translation.
[261] Ibid.

*sinners* and *marginalized*, for the poor, the sick and the excluded."[262] Through such an attitude he seems to transmit his absolute trust in the Father. This became clear in the treatment of *Abba*. Thus, its appearance in the Gethsemane context (Mk14:36) is significant. Such an expression (even if many scholars do not accept the popular idea of identifying it with "daddy") is a peculiar expression of Jesus and it implies an important experience of intimacy with God without undermining an experience of obedience. But even when this peculiar word is not used, Jesus always treats God as Father or my Father, except in Mk 15:34 and its parallels. [263]

As Jesus' followers we are invited by him to share this relation of closeness and intimacy with the Father. Within the Synoptic Gospels Jesus' wish of introducing his disciples into this relationship is clear. When talking with his disciples, Jesus refers to *your father* (e.g. Mk 11:25)[264]and when teaching them to pray, asks them to call God *Our Father* (Lk 11:2). Already as a risen Christ, Jesus sends Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:17) to his brethren to tell them "I am ascending to *my* Father and *your* Father, *my* God and *your* God."[265] The distinction implicit in all these texts, between *my* Father and *your* Father, seems to point out what Mollat and Barret implied commenting on John's text: "there are still two forms of filiation: that of Jesus and that of the Christian."[266] Even stressing our affiliation with God as something that only Jesus can guarantee us, the evangelists also want to distinguish it from Jesus' affiliation in order to preserve his distinctiveness.

If we want to realize how a human can follow Jesus in his experience of affiliation, it is important to realize how Jesus expressed his trust in God. Let me mention just some points. These

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[262] Andrés Torres Queiruga, "Creo en Dios, Creador del Cielo y de la Tierra," in *Recuperar la Creación. Por una religión humanizadora* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1996), 64.
[263] Cf. Ladaria, 147.
[264] "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."
[265] The *italics* are mine.
[266] Mollat and Barret mentioned by Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John,* Daniel Harrington (ed.), ( Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 529.

points should not be understood apart from one another but in their totality: a) Gratitude: Jesus expresses on different occasions his gratitude. He prays in thanksgiving, even before the miracles or signs had become visible to everyone. He gives thanks before the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11:41), and also before the multiplication of the bread (Jn 6:11). b) Dependence: Jesus recognizes that the mission he is accomplishing is not his own invention: *"I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me"* (Jn 8:28). c) Obedience: the above-mentioned episode of Gethsemane where Jesus, overcoming his resistance, trusts and obeys, is a good example of the connection between obedience and trust (Mc 14:36). d) Union: this theme is particularly a Johannine topic. Through such union John seems to want to reveal Jesus as the "visible presence of God."[267] "This is not a study in metaphysics but a statement on the oneness of purpose that unites Father and Son, created by a union of love and obedience."[268] Jesus offers to all his disciples the possibility to participate in this same oneness (Jn 17: 21-23).

Finally, I would like to mention that it is through the action of the Holy Spirit that the human being is able to be aware of this experience of affiliation. The Holy Spirit is the One who creates in the human being the attitude of a Son of God: *And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba!"* (Gal 4:6).

From all that has been said it seems clear that our own understanding of ourselves as human beings cannot in any circumstance be separated from our relation with the Son. Looking to him as the image of what we are called to be, we can easily understand what we cannot surrender if we intend to preserve our experience of creatureliness. To conclude this chapter I offer a personal synthesis regarding what I believe we must preserve from our tradition in order to help teenagers to experience themselves as creatures of God.

[267] Moloney, 314.
[268] Ibid.

## 3.5 Personal Synthesis

In this chapter I outlined some of the most important features of the human being as a creature, as intrinsically referred to God. I did this in order to bring out which of these features is being challenged by the culture in which teenagers are living. Based on such characteristics I will propose a theological and pastoral answer raised by the situations described in the previous chapters. In order to prepare this response I will underline what I believe needs to be preserved from our tradition in order to propose to teenagers the recognition of themselves as creatures of God.

Initially, I would like to set up our theological mindset. The perspective defended in this thesis is that the theological anthropology leading us in our process needs to be an *anthropology from below.* As noted before, the recognition of being creature is first of all an existential experience. It is from its experience of liberation that the people of God is led to talk about God as creator. We also saw that the orientation of the human being toward God happens in a concrete historical existence. Consequently we need to take the incarnation seriously in its theological consequences if we want to help teenagers. *Creature* is not a word to explain, it is an experience to propose. That will only be possible if we are able to be in touch with our interiority and with one another. Accepting our incarnated condition is one of the urgencies for those who are living within the culture of disclosure.

Having established our theological framework let us now say what we want to preserve from this chapter. Being a creature implies recognition of our interdependence and our ultimate dependence on God. We are not self-sufficient and we need to overcome our narcissistic tendencies. Absolutizing our autonomy (separating it from our relational dimension), it would not be possible to be grateful, open and self-giving.

As Image of God, each human being is "sealed" with an essential and vital dignity which cannot be understood apart from his/her relational dimension. In fact our being image depends on God's relation with each one of us and it cannot also be perceived apart from our constitutive human relationships: "What and who *my* real 'self' is, is a mystery which is constituted by the mystery of others."[269] Only within relationality can we be the Image of a trinitarian God to whom relationality is constitutive of identity. This *being image* also generates another decisive consequence: our irreducibility as human beings, our elusiveness. We are unique and unrepeatable, and there is no person who can be reduced by any form of knowledge or to any relationship. We are more than what is implied by our Facebook profiles. The tendency to think of ourselves and others in reduced terms needs to be healed.

The search for fulfillment is a sign of our orientation toward God. This aspiration is identifiable in the ways teenagers are trying to make sense of their lives (namely through posting on blogs or social networks); to be recognized as lovable by others and in the necessity of looking for new emotions through constant texting messages. As we saw in the second chapter, some of these interactions might lead to an experience of dilution, of a lost of unicity and integrity. A personal relation with God and the recognition of God's constant care for us is important to avoid such dilution.

From a Christian perspective it is not possible to deepen our human experience without a personal relationship with Jesus. Through such practice we will be able to enter into Jesus' experience of affiliation, being by adoption through the Spirit what Jesus is by nature. Within that relationship we will be able to recognize ourselves as received beings and we will be able to gratefully express ourselves before God, accepting the missions God trusts to us. In our relation with God and in the relations fostered within our communities it will also important to learn a true

[269] Sachs, 19.

intimacy, an intimacy where what is revealed does not undermine but highlights the mystery of God and the mystery of the human being. The intimacy we need to live with one another and "teach" to teenagers needs to be an image of this intimacy.

At any moment this experience could be transformed into a solipsistic and pious exercise. Our relationship with God can never be separated from the love for our neighbor, from our communitarian relationships and our social responsibility. As I will explain in the next chapter the Christian communities cannot be for teenagers a place for hiddenness. Christian communities must help teenagers to recognize what experiences and values might lead them in their lives, namely in what concerns the proper interiorization of technology.

Defining all these principles it is not to build up any kind of an abstract essentialism. In fact, to identify what is happening in our hearts in the present moment and what God might be fostering within our inner lives, we need to be aware of our identity as God's creatures. The theological and pastoral proposal that I will develop in the last chapter of this thesis needs to be always rooted in what was said in this chapter.

## 4. Conclusion: A New Sense of Interior Life

The first goal of this thesis was to reveal how the interiorization of the technologies of relationship is transforming teenagers' inner lives. We did such analyses in the second chapter. At the end of that chapter we identified the questions we believe to underlie all that teenagers are expressing through the technologies of relationship. Each one of these questions might be related with three constituent dimensions of the human being as a creature of God. *Who am I?* (origin); *Am I loved?* (essence); *Where am I going?* (ultimate goal).

In the third chapter we developed each one of these dimensions according to the Christian tradition as a means of presenting a meaningful horizon, the divine ground of being. Presenting such perspective to teenagers might give them the reference they need for a proper interiorization of technology and, thus, suggest a significant way to address the stated questions.

It is important to acknowledge that "grace encounters us within the human."[270] To help teenagers recognize such grace we need to help them to be in touch with their humanity. This chapter develops a brief theological proposal to inspire an appropriate pastoral approach to the reality of teenagers living in the culture of disclosure. I will start by identifying what I believe God might be fostering in teenagers' interior lives and then I will expose the way through which we may help teenagers to recognize God's action in their lives and thus their creatureliness. By starting with God, I want to make clear that in our relationship with him, God has always the initiative.

[270] Michael P. Gallagher, *Dive Deeper. The Human Poetry of Faith* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001), 104.

4.1 What Might God Be Fostering in Teenagers' Interior Lives?

First of all I believe God is inviting teenagers to recognize and accept their vulnerability. Vulnerability implies allowing ourselves to be seen in our weakness, implies being exposed and thus being partially unprotected and available to be hurt. Vulnerability implies insecurity. We saw how teenagers often use the technologies of relationship to hide themselves, avoiding revealing too much or performing an ideal self. When they do this they unconsciously recognize that something in them needs to be preserved, needs to be cared for, a vulnerable self.

Simultaneously, they also reveal the fear of being disposable[271] (as a Big Brother character), of being unfriended (on Facebook) or not worth contacting. These feelings reveal the experience of needing a strength that does not come from me. Sometimes technology itself might help to cope with this vulnerability. Recall the case of a girl who expressed her weakness before her friends after exposing them online and getting good feedback. The desire expressed by some teenagers to be alone might be a signal of the need to touch and accept this vulnerability. There teenagers might hear the Gospel invitation *to be like a child*, accepting their insufficiency and trusting.

Is not easy to listen to the call for vulnerability. Sometimes such a call is repressed. The text replacing the voice, the difficulty of eye contact and the exaggerated performance of the self are good examples of the way vulnerability is being hidden. But as we saw for some of the testimonies collected by Turkle, teenagers are conscious of these wounds. I believe it is possible to recognize here a sign of God's presence. To accept vulnerability is to be open to the presence of others, is to accept that I am limited and created, is to accept that I am not the center. As Levinas puts it: "only a vulnerable I can love his neighbor."[272] Santos sees technologies of

[271] Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003), 88.
[272] Levinas quoted by Santos, 54.

relationship as a promising place to express vulnerability. We do not dismiss such a possibility but we also see it as being used to hide vulnerability. In the following section we will propose how teenagers might be helped to overcome such concealment, in order to fulfill what we believe God is requiring from us.

Mature love is the place where our vulnerability might be unmasked.[273] Naturally, teenagers might experience a mature love as a way to which they are tending, as a process they are going through. That is the call they are receiving when challenged to accept interdependence. This is the second feature I believe God is sketching in teenagers' inner life. Recognizing such a challenge requires a contemplative attitude which sees beyond the surface.

On the surface some signs might leave us uncomfortable. Transience[274] is considered to be one of the values of the Internet. Connected with human relations this value might be expressed through a tendency to live human relationships as essentially temporary. Furthermore, as we saw when describing the tension between the voice and the text, teenagers sometimes fear commitment and they fear to risk too much in terms of their relations. In addition, the contradiction experienced between being present, yet absent and being absent, yet intermittently present, seems to point in the direction of a certain loneliness. Finally, two more tendencies degrade the experience of interdependence. Stalking appears to be a way to reduce the terms in which I see the other. The exaggeration of self promotion disfigures the self and makes it consider itself as its own creator. Together, all said so far seems to justify Bauman's assumption that "the world today seems to be conspiring against trust."[275] In fact, it is not easy to sustain a relation of trust with temporary friends, without taking risks and committing ourselves to be truly present to

[273] Cf. Gallagher, 2001, 23.
[274] Cf. Note 106
[275] Bauman, 91.

others. Is not easy to trust if we feel that the other is stalking me or he/she is selling me a fake image of him/her.

Considering all that has been said, Bauman is undoubtedly accurate. Then, how might we venture to say that God is fostering a sense of interdependence in teenagers' interior lives? In their seeking recognition, approval and feedback, in their ability to interact, to healthily expand their relationships and to creatively and commonly express themselves lies the revelation that they are intuitively (maybe not always consciously) aware that they need others in order to be themselves and that they are responsible for others. To rise up from the conspiracy against trust and to build up relations of mutual confidence and interdependence, we must overcome the tendency to apprehend others and ourselves in easy concepts. It is the urgency of this task that is asking for the apophatic anthropology that we are about to propose.

Finally, we would like to mention the search for direction as the third characteristic of teenagers' inner lives that God might be fostering. Gergen described identity as continuously "redirected as one moves through the sea of ever-changing relationships."[276] We distanced ourselves from such a conception. Nevertheless, we must recognize that, pretending to be descriptive, the notion of a self without a constant or definitive direction is also pre-formative and it molds the culture affecting social interactions. Affecting youth culture this vision might hide teenagers' reference to God as their "ultimate goal." Yet, it is possible to find glimpses of "resistance," in the way some sites allow processes of healthy confrontation, offer elements for self-reflection, contribute to reconfigure their values. The use of the Internet by teenagers for self-documentation as a way of making sense of their personal growth and of finding what direction their lives are going, also witnesses the need and the search for meaningful horizons. Contrary to what Gergen apparently thinks, the technologies of relationship do not dismiss the self's need for

[276] Gergen, 139.

orientations, for having a direction, an inescapable horizon. Here the presence of God might be insinuated as an invitation to find a definitive and "safe" direction.

## 4.2 What Can We Do?

Believing that God might be fostering in teenagers' interior lives a vulnerable and interdependent self looking for direction, we must now identify what might be our task in order to participate in fostering this process. Before presenting my proposal I will establish three important preambles that we must take into account if we want our proposal to be effective and fruitful. If a pastoral development of this proposal is to be made, it cannot forget these preambles.

### 4.2.1 Three Brief Preambles

The first preamble is essentially a developmental consideration about adolescence. As we already saw society demands too much from teenagers. But it is important to be aware of what we can and what we cannot ask and expect from teenagers. Following Robert Kegan's *Principles of Meaning Organization*[277] we want to identify such appropriate and inappropriate expectations. Teenagers are able to understand and internalize another's point of view and develop a sense of empathy. They are able to internalize different points of view and, consequently, to develop a certain sophistication in their thoughts, identifying possible conflicts of values and certain ambiguities. In this process emotions might be experienced as internal states and not as mere social transactions. They also might be aware of shared feelings and give priority to agreements developed within their social interactions over individual interests. Nevertheless, they are not able yet to build up a complex system able to regulate all their relationships and interactions and clearly distinguish the self from one's relationships. They also cannot organize the diverse

[277] Cf. Kegan, 30-31. I am closely following and paraphrasing Kegan's thought.

internal dimensions of the self into a systematic whole. Kegan's considerations might help us to realize how being by themselves and living the demands coming from the use of the technologies of relationship might be too much for them. Some of the wounds identified in the second chapter might be healed and prevented if we were able to accompany them.

The second preamble concerns the culture of disclosure and its relations with faith. In our secularized context we often express a justifiable concern with God's concealment. Simultaneously, we look for the signs of God's presence trying to unveil culture from all that obscures God's presence. In a very simple and modest away we did that at the beginning of this chapter. But another step is needed if the Presence of God is to be perceived and welcomed, if we want teenagers to understand themselves as creatures of God. We need to follow God when he asks Adam after he had eaten from the tree of the knowledge: "*Where are you*?" (Gen 3: 9). In fact, as we saw, technologies of relationship might hide from human beings some of their deepest realities, might wound such dimensions. Paradoxically, the culture of disclosure is partially hiding humanity from human beings. Only by uncovering our humanity can we allow ourselves to be founded by Grace. What I previous called an *Anthropology from below* must start its task here, in the center of our hearts, looking for the "human foundations of faith."[278] In this process we need to consider that, when it is interiorized, technology is assumed by human beings with its ambivalences and ambiguities. I wonder if the excess of Ong's optimism concerning the second oral culture was not related with not taking sufficiently into account the interiorization of such ambivalences and ambiguities. The ambivalences bring with them the possibility of developing within human consciousness values that might enlarge or reduce the human spirit. The ambiguities are more difficult to discern because an apparent value might be hiding an unrevealed intention or value. Going to the heart of our consciousnesses we need to discern all these realities.

[278] Gallagher, 2001, 117.

The last preamble is related to the human foundations of faith. Michael Paul Gallagher often uses this concept. The Irish theologian constantly and consistently defends that "today's typical crisis of faith involves a culturally induced desolation on the pre-religious level."[279] The teenagers' questions concerning their identity, their need for recognition and their life's goals are situated on this level. Most of time they will not appear so clearly formulated as we did here. Before recognizing themselves as creatures of God connecting these questions with their religious level, they need to unearth such questions from their hearts and relate them with their daily questions. Such daily questions will be about friendship and deception, being in love or feeling unworthy, the pain caused by parents' conflicts or the death of a loved one. Addressing such questions is the way to reconcile teenagers with their humanity. The assumption of our theological proposal is that, more important than teaching teenagers how to use technology is leading them to recognize their humanity. To re-discover such mystery and be reconciled with ourselves as creatures of God is the anthropological and theological ground needed for a proper interiorization of technology. As *Gaudium et Spes* puts it: "it is necessary to develop the human faculties in such a way that there results a growth of the faculty of admiration, of intuition, of contemplation, of making personal judgment, of developing a religious, moral and social sense." (GS 59) That is the ground that we will develop now.

### 4.2.2 What to Propose? - An Apophatic Anthropology: *Don't catch me if you can*

In the third chapter we gave some attention to the elusiveness of the human being connecting such elusiveness with our being as image of God. We saw in that moment that the person cannot be considered as "an object open to inspection,"[280] once the "person is the

[279] Ibid, 120.
[280] Clément, 30.

irreducibility of the individual to his human nature."[281] This clearly contrasts with part of what is happening within youth culture, namely what concerns the use of the technologies of relationship and the reduced terms in which it allows people to consider each other. So, as we did in the third chapter, we reaffirm now the necessity of an apophatic anthropology. Such anthropology constitutes an exercise of humility through which we accept the impossibility of knowing everything about anyone. This humble theological exercise might be achieved following three interrelated paths: the path from seeing human beings in reduced terms to the recognition of human beings as a mystery; the path from pan-self-ism (and narcissism) to neighborship (or generativity) and the path from considering ourselves as our own creators to being a recognized and grateful creature before God. These three paths might also be understood as "echoing Rahner's proposal for a substitute for traditional apologetics, we are in need of a pastoral "mystagogy," a gradual initiation of people into a sense of mystery situated not only in special moments of quiet wonder but also within their daily exercise of freedom."[282]In Ongian terms we would say that our intention is going against the maximization of the "it" and the minimization of the "I" and the "thou."[283]

### 4.2.3 How to Propose: Sacred Spaces of Values

The expression "sacred spaces" and its connections with values is used by Sherry Turkle in her book. She refers the use of such expression to a moment when she was studying a cohort of scientists, engineers and designers who were immersed in a simulation project assisted by computers. Despite their commitment to simulation and computers "members of each group held certain aspects of their professional life to be inviolate." Each group needed a space where "apart from simulation (…) they felt most fully themselves in their discipline." So, for instance when

[281] Losskys quoted by Clément, 30.
[282] Gallagher, 2006.
[283] Cf. Ong, 1967, 289.

design students were losing their skills professors sent them off to a hand drawing class. This was not a rejection of the computer but a way to come to it "with their [designers'] own values." The drawing class was their sacred place. According to Turkle "a sacred place is not a place to hide out. It is a place where we recognize ourselves and our commitments." [284]

I find inspiring the expression used by Turkle. Even if we must broaden its meaning, the expression "sacred spaces" could be used in order to explain what a Christian community might be for a teenager in order to reflect on her or his life whether as expressed online or offline. This will not be a place to hide oneself from life but a place to assume life more fully. It will be a place to experience, to be in touch with what we are, what we live, with the exterior world and with the Absolute.[285] "To experience" is here understood as "going through the exercise of being, somehow, *affected*, touched, and provoked, in our own reality, but at least in a process of self-reflection and discernment."[286] It will be a place open to the Word, where the thickness and depth of life are to be perceived and the solidity of ties to be learned. It will be a place where people might be really present to one another,[287] where a truly I-Thou communication and relationship might happen.

In order to help teenagers to enter into their sacred place we will enunciate three steps. Each one of these steps matches, somehow, with the three paths of the apophatic anthropology. Nevertheless, the boundaries of these ways are not clearly defined, thus in its own away each step might be helpful in order to go along the different (but not separate) walks.

[284] Turkle, 277. This reference is valid for the several previous quotes.
[285] Cf. Correia, 2006, 511.
[286] Ibid. My translation.
[287] Cf. Ong, 1969, 89.

4.2.3.1 Go Deeper: Recognize the Human Questions

Our first journey is a journey to the human heart. Following the biblical tradition, the heart should be understood not as the warehouse of emotions but as the center of the person, as her or his consciousness, where all the faculties hold together in order to move the human being. The heart is the place "where the spiritual combat is fought,"[288] where the self faces its tensions and fights.

Diving into one's own heart is not easy. It requires silence, and it requires preparedness for silence. Often there is too much noise and activity in youth ministry. Silence is needed and silence is longed for by teenagers. A deep dive is difficult without a first confrontation with our vulnerability, a first contact with what is harming us. A lot might be found in various places: the teenager is hurt by the absence of eye contact with her mother when she picks her up at school, the feeling of being unnoticed when no one answers my text messages, feeling labeled or seen in reduced terms by others. All these wounds might be related with the human questions we have mentioned, but they might also be related to the recognition of ourselves as a mystery. Why do we resist being seen in reduced terms? Because deep in our hearts we are aware of "the irreducible fathomlessness of personal existence,"[289] we recognize human beings' elusiveness as a mark of their being *image of God*. Why do we feel the restlessness of our hearts longing for love? Because deep in our hearts we know they are incomplete and desire fulfillment. As Nicolas Cabasilas says our hearts "were made great enough to contain God himself."[290]

But our aspirations might be driven by our ambiguity and be harmful for others and for ourselves. When our hearts do not contain the "Uncreated" they might manipulate creation, they

[288] Clément, 64.
[289] Clément, 64.
[290] Nicolas Cabasilas quoted by Clément, 21.

might "turn their desire towards created objects,"[291] or consider other human being as objects. In fact, sometimes it is easier to label than to accept what is inscrutable, sometimes it is easier to grasp the one who loves us than to allow her or him to love us freely. Teenagers experience these realties in their lives. They suffer when they feel labeled and when someone hurts their trust by using them. Acknowledging this experience of personal suffering they might recognize that sometimes they also do wrong; they also hurt others and do what they do not imagine being able to do. As Simone Weil beautifully says in one of her poems:

> A beloved being who disappoints me. I have written to him. It is impossible that he should not reply by saying what I have said to myself in his name.
> Men owe us what we imagine they will give us. We must forgive them this debt.
> To accept the fact that they are other than the creatures of our imagination is to imitate the renunciation of God.
> I also am other than what I imagine myself to be. To know this is forgiveness[292].

To make contact with our fallen state, to recognize that *I am other than what I imagine myself to be*, does not need to end as an experience of self-guilt, closing the self within itself. This would be narcissism. The contact with our fallen state and with our insufficiency might be an invitation to accept our constitutive dependence, our creatureliness and that "every person is a gaping space waiting to be filled with God."[293]

If we are able to accompany teenagers in their interior journey toward the recognition of their insufficiency, we might be able to propose the sacrament of Penance as something flowing from their human experience and as a door to open them to the experience of being loved by God. They might recognize the need for redemption and link that to their responsibility for their neighbors, knowing that what they do affects the whole human community. Starting from teenagers' experience and allowing the Spirit to lead them from there to God, is following the

[291] Clément, 21.
[292] Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 9. I knew this poem in its Portuguese translation. Looking for the English version I found it in this book through Google search.
[293] Clément, 21.

steps of God's people. As we already said, the recognition of being a creature is first of all an existential experience. Is from its experience of liberation that the people of God is led to talk about God as creator. The importance given to human experience as departure point toward God, also helps them to be touch with reality, to recognize themselves as incarnated and created beings.

#### 4.2.3.2 Look Outside: Do Not Fear to Be a Neighbor

The reality of relationships and friendship is unquestionably close to teenagers' experience. Visit such reality and allow them to express it in or communities it is important to understand what they are going through. But we need to help them to recognize what of our relational dimensions as creatures might be undermined by the present culture.

In a public lecture given in Braga and available on YouTube the Italian theologian Pierangelo Sequeri criticizes what he believes to be two contemporary traps: the idea of self-realization and the idea that to love the neighbor we must previously love ourselves.

Sequeri identifies self-realization with the idea of "self-creation" and of enjoying personal qualities and activities only as way of fulfilling our individual aims. He also suggests that create people centered in the idea of self-realization leads to a world where the relationships, including love relationships, might be seen as a threat to self-realization.[294]

Self-realization also implies the possibility of starting anew every day. According to Sequeri, this idea is often wrongly connected with "the Christian language of permanent conversion."[295] The mistake is that the idea of starting anew every day is deduced from the logic of the market that needs to change every day. Following such logic what we do today will not have any value tomorrow. The idea of continuity in our commitments and relations falls apart.

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[294] Cf. Pierangelo Sequeri, *A Armadilha da auto-realização* (Public Lecture, Braga: Auditório Vita) Published on YouTube on July, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xvr4Jk41Rj0 Accessed August 13, 2012. In the vídeos published on YouTube there is no information concerning the exact date of this lecture.

[295] Ibid.

The continuity is replaced by the urgency of having new relations every day, new emotions. What we have is never enough. The anxiety concerned with the idea of being "always on" waiting for new messages, waiting for the possibility of having new emotions is a cultural expression of Sequeri's statements. Such an argument might also be exemplified by exaggeration of the idea of the self as a self-creation allowed by the technologies of relationship. The Christian logic is different. It goes forward by looking for a person in whom to generate something. This is the logic of creation. God generated us and offered us the possibility to generate in others.

In order to assume this logic in our lives, another trap needs to be defused: the idea that to love the neighbor we must previously love ourselves. According Sequeri[296] this logic does not follow human physiology. In human relations we desire to personally return the love we recognize to have previously received. We desire to light in others' live this same love. If we think that the beauty of the love we receive needs to be lived first for ourselves, to check if it works, and then give it back to others, this will not work. Others will not receive love. It will be corrupted. Centered in ourselves, thinking if we are happy enough, if we are loved enough we will never be satisfied. We will never consider loving ourselves enough and feel prepared to love others. Something will be always missing. These two traps are present in our youth ministry when we let our celebration with youth seem a laboratory of emotions which intend to proportionate a personal well-being and when an "ideology of intimacy"[297] closes youth groups in on themselves.

The *dis*-centered self-logic is not easy to propose to teenagers. The difficulty comes from the ambiguity of the technologies of relationship that might foster a tendency to narcissism. Such difficulty is also stressed by the inner process that teenagers are living and makes them to be

[296] Sequeri, *Amar o próximo como a si mesmo* (Public Lecture, Braga: Auditório Vita) Published on YouTube on Febuary, 17, 2011. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xl4dYbKOEFU Accessed August, 14, 2012.
[297] Richard Sennett quoted by Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols. An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 197.

partially self-centered in their emotions and interests. But they are prepared to accept that personal interests are not the priority, as we mentioned in the preamble concerning their developmental stage. Deep inside, teenagers were confronted with themselves as mystery and with their incompleteness. Now, looking outside they are invited to recognize that "what and who *my* real 'self' is, is a mystery which is constituted by the mystery of others."[298] This recognition might be the starting point for generativity and for responsibility for others. If for Ong a dialogical consciousness was an achievement of the second oral culture, I believe Christian tradition might help to foster an interdependent consciousness as an achievement of our culture.

For this to happen our communities, our spaces of value, need to be places for listening and discernment. By working with teenagers it is easy to realize that it is not always easy for them to listen attentively to the other. But it is also possible to testify to the potency of the word as an event: "the word as sound signals interiority and mystery (a certain inaccessibility even in intimacy)."[299] In fact, when they are able to listen deeply to the other, they might experience a reverential surprise being touched by his or her vulnerability. They might learn others' inapprehensibility (as the disciples with the Risen Christ), their sacredness and they might be moved, as the Samaritan, to be a neighbor for them. Definitely, they experience the other as a Thou, as a presence to be welcomed, as someone to whom I want to be present.

These communities also need to be places of discernment which do not allow teenagers to be closed in on their group. For this to happen, the presence of young adults and adults as models of generativity and prophecy is important. Models of generativity because they are not centered in themselves and are able to generate hope, joy and trust in others. Models of prophecy because they are able to open the community to the world and thus, they help teenagers to recognize larger

[298] Sachs, 19.
[299] Ong, 1967, 314.

horizons of neighborhood. "Congregations can become communities of discernment for both adolescents and adults, wherein the principles of the religious tradition assist, challenge, and support both teens and adults in navigating their lives in the world."[300]

In Christian terms this experience of interdependence is called communion and it is sacramentally expressed in the Eucharist. If we are able to help teenagers to connect the human experience of friendship, the call to neighborhood and generativity with the strong and solid ties fostered by the Eucharist in the body of the Church, they might discover it not as something that needs to be always nice and to make them feel good but as the place where we learn with Christ to generate life.

4.2.3.3 Look farther: Learning With Jesus to Say *Abba*

The two steps enunciated above might be seen as two steps toward openness. First we saw how teenagers might open themselves to their inner reality and then how they might open themselves to others. In these two movements it is possible to recognize a special Presence as their inner dynamic: "When human beings, across history, gave attention to the best of themselves, they heard their intimate voices; they knew that their intimate voices were the echo of a prior *voice*."[301] In fact, this Presence[302] discloses the human being as dialogic, i.e. discloses the human being as having in his or her *heart* a *mystery* bigger than his or herself[303]and opens the human being to a larger reality, to recognize his/her identity as intrinsically relational.

It is not easy to make teenagers aware of this Presence and, it is especially not easy to make them recognize the subtlety of such Presence's dynamics; nor to make them recognize such

[300] Theresa O'Keefe, "The Same but Different: the culture in which our adolescents live," in *Journal of Youth and Theology,* v.7, nº2, (November 2008), 57.
[301] Juan Martin Velasco, *La experiencia Cristiana de Dios* (Madrid: Trotta, 2007), 25. My translation.
[302] There is here some parallel with the way Ong described the Presence. Cf p. 24.
[303] H.U. von Balthazar as quoted by Martin Velasco, 28. My translation.

Presence as God. But we can present them Jesus as the One where such Presence was made flesh for us. In a culture marked by the technologies of relationship, in a world marked by so many forms of communication, Jesus might be presented as God's "final communication."[304]

One appropriate place to understand this is the relation between Jesus and his Father. As we already saw in the previous chapter this relation is especially expressed by Jesus treating God as *Abba* and Father. Inviting teenagers to be Jesus' followers and recognize the Presence of God in their lives implies letting them know that they are invited by Jesus to share this relation of closeness and intimacy with the Father. Consequently, the recognition of Jesus as a friend is important, as the One to Whom I might truly open my whole life and confess everything, knowing that I will be fully respected. Jesus' baptism (Mt 3:13-17) might be a good passage to "initiate" teenagers into this relation of closeness with Jesus, taking into account his own relation with the Father. There Jesus is presented as the beloved son. This is significant in terms of his identity. But once this identity is clarified in the beginning of Jesus' ministry it cannot be separated from the sense of obedience implied in the mission that Jesus received. Consequently, once "Jesus is the only one who might introduce ourselves in the relationship of affiliation he has with God,"[305] introducing teenagers to that relationship cannot dismiss this sense of obedience by underlining only the intimacy.

Such a sense of obedience highlights God's transcendence and, simultaneously, invites us to discover in God our origin but also the One who points us in the direction of our lives. In their personal relation with Jesus this would mean that teenagers should be challenged to discover him not only as a friend but also as the Lord. Lord whose Lordship was expressed through service: "For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the

[304] Ong, 1967, 319.
[305] Ladaria, 147. My Translation.

table? But I am among you as one who serves." (Lk: 22, 27) The sense of reverence is not easy to foster in teenagers but is important in order to help them to deeply discover what it means to have Jesus as the horizon of their lives. Giving them the sense of receiving a mission entrusted to them by God is the appropriated way of doing so. Gradually teenagers must feel that responsibilities for the community and for the world are entrusted to them. Growing in awareness of being missionaries might be connected with the sacrament of Confirmation.[306]

The aim of the three paths presented in this conclusion is to address the new sense of a interior life that is being fostered through the interiorization of the technologies of relationship. In their ambiguity and ambivalence these technologies might contribute to hiding some of our human dimensions and especially our consciousness of being creatures of God. My conviction is that if we follow these paths in our ministry with teenagers the chances that they will properly interiorize the technologies they are using and properly express themselves through them significantly increase. For that to be possible it is also necessary that intimacy might be learned in our communities. It should be learned in gradually and in depth always faithful to our inapprensibility as human beings.

[306] Despite the actual tendency, namely in the Lisbon Diocese, to recover the traditional sequence of the Sacraments of initiation, I believe that it would be important to maintain Confirmation as a Sacrament where teenagers (around 16-18 years old) might recognize the Grace of God as opening them to a missionary consciousness.

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